

United States of Shondaland:
Investigating the para-social contact of white
audiences with Black Lives Matter

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Abstract

Race relations in the United States are an ongoing issue that is presented differently by different groups. The election of Barack Obama in 2008 fostered the myth of a post-racial nation, where racial inequalities no longer existed, and racism was seen as individualised, rather than structural and institutional. Television shows airing during this time reproduced this post-racial myth, especially television shows produced by Shonda Rhimes' company, Shondaland. At this specific moment in time, in the US, the post-racial myth is being disrupted by activist groups, like Black Lives Matter [BLM]; while President Donald Trump and his followers try to keep the post-racial myth intact. This thesis investigates the connection between watching racially diverse television shows and empathy with groups outside the participant's subject position, specifically, BLM.

This thesis is driven by three research questions: Do non-stereotypical portrayals of African Americans prime white audience members to take a favourable view of race relations in general? How do viewers of Shondaland television shows interpellate the stories told in Shondaland into their interactions with people in their social world? Is there a correlation between watching Shondaland and having stronger endorsement for groups like BLM or other 'minority' issues? This thesis uses the concept of para-social contact to unpack the connection between the white audience who watch post-racial Shondaland shows and their empathy or support for movements like BLM versus the white audience of more white-centric television shows and their comparative views on the movement. Using audience research methods to explore white people's television viewing, this thesis maps out how those who are more exposed to Black, post-racial, television characters are more inclined to support the BLM movement. This thesis found that those white participants who are not exposed to such representations are not as empathetic to the movement. By combining critical race theory and audience research methodology this thesis provides a unique examination of these questions.

Keywords: post-race, para-social contact, Black Lives Matter, Shondaland, critical race theory, audience reception

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Introduction

The aim of this research is to investigate the connection between watching diverse television shows and empathy with groups outside a participant's subject position, specifically, Black Lives Matter [BLM]. The title of this thesis, *United States of Shondaland: Investigating the para-social contact of white audiences with Black Lives Matter*, refers to two main things: first, it refers to Shondaland, which is the name of Shonda Rhimes' production company that produces the post-racial television shows, *Grey's Anatomy*, *Scandal* and *How to Get Away with Murder*, among others. The reason I have chosen the Shondaland television universe to base my research around, is because it was the subject of my honours dissertation; I conducted a discourse analysis of the post-raciality of the three Shondaland television shows. In this thesis, my focus has moved to the audience of these shows; specifically, the white audience of these television shows. This brings me to the second part of the title; this thesis is investigating how the Shondaland audience's para-social contact¹ with Black characters may positively shape the audience's attitude to race relations and, specifically, the BLM movement.

In my usage of terms such as 'white' and 'Black' I take my lead from Black scholars, such as Patricia Hill Collins, who argues for the use of the label Black by stating, "For African Americans, the term Black is simultaneously a racial identity assigned to people of African descent by the state, a political identity for petitioning that same state, and a self-defined ethnic identity." (2004a, p.17). Collins objects to the use of quote marks around the word 'race' as though it expresses the social constructedness of the word, it is not also done to 'gender' or 'sexuality'. While race is socially constructed, it does have material effects on those who are oppressed due to their race (or gender or sexuality) (2004a). Whiteness, like Blackness is a standpoint from which we see the world. While it is not the only mitigating factor in how audiences read texts or relate to other people, it shapes people's lives and viewpoints in the same way that gender, sexuality and class do (Frankenberg, 1993). This thesis is focussed more so on race than gender, sexuality or class, but the author is aware of the layers and interaction of these intersectional oppressions and how they affect the way in which people live their lives and view others.

¹ Para-social contact refers to the phenomenon where television audiences form beliefs and feelings about the people that they only know through television (Schiappa, Gregg and Hewes, 2006). Para-social contact hypothesis will be discussed in more detail in chapter three.

I must state, first and foremost, that I am a white New Zealander, so my knowledge of the United States [US] is limited to mass media consumption, primarily film, television and news media. I have never been to the US, so my experience with US culture is limited to what is portrayed in the media. In New Zealand [NZ] the majority of our media content comes from the US²: most of the films at the cinema, television programs on our screen and, more recently, with the rise of Donald Trump to presidency, our local news programming and sites are filled with more US news coverage than ever before. As a white woman, all my knowledge of racial discrimination and Black experiences, occur through the media products that I consume. I watch, and would consider myself a fan of, the three Shondaland television shows. Though they are considered post-racial i.e. where race is not an issue for characters to overcome, watching these three shows led to me being more aware of racial injustices and issues. I became more aware of issues of Black representation in film and television (through following some of the actors from the three shows). This led to me noticing issues in the US, especially the shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, in 2014 and the heightening of the BLM movement after his death. My only personal connection to these issues was through the Black characters that I loved and identified with in Shondaland. I saw these characters as real people, people who made me cry and that I connected emotionally with what they were going through in their lives, dramatic and unrealistic as they were. In this thesis I wanted to see whether other white people had a similar connection to these characters I loved so much, and whether this too affected how they felt about racial injustices and BLM.

The end of the Obama presidency has deconstructed the US post-racial myth that reached its climax at his 2008 election. The resurgence of white supremacy into the mainstream and the activism of BLM has returned [white] people's attention toward racial issues. Slowly but surely, the truth of systemic racial discrimination is coming to the forefront of peoples' minds and making its way into media products. Even within Shonda Rhimes' post-racial television utopia, racism is apparent in the stories told in the television shows. Even Shondaland can't cover over the mass racial discrimination and police profiling of young Black men: as evidenced in the 2017-2018 series of the three Shondaland shows. In *Grey's Anatomy* (season 14, episode 10 "Personal Jesus"), a 12-year-old Black boy is shot in the face by police as he climbed through a window into his own house. This episode ends with one character, Dr Bailey, giving the 'talk' to her 13-

2 In 2016 only 31% of free-to-air television content broadcast between 6am-midnight was locally produced, with 45% being news, current affairs or sports content (NZ On Air, 2017).

year-old Black son, telling him how to behave when around police officers, because he will be treated differently to his white friends. In a *Scandal/How to Get Away with Murder* cross over special (*Scandal* season 7, episode 12 “Allow Me to Reintroduce Myself”/*How to Get Away with Murder* season 4, episode 13 “Lahey v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania”), the episode talks about mass incarceration and the way that non-white people are arrested and not given adequate legal representation. Even in the colour-blind cast, post-racial utopia that is Shondaland, they are now engaging with racism at a structural level, facing issues that they have ignored in the past.

This thesis uses critical race theory and audience research methods in a new way. By investigating how white viewers connect para-socially to post-racial Black characters and may therefore empathise with the BLM movement, this thesis aims to illustrate how important it is to have more representations of non-white characters in television shows. I have found that those who watched Shondaland or other racially diverse television shows had a greater depth of understanding for minority issues, or issues that do not directly affect them. I interviewed seven white participants, three who watch the Shondaland shows, and four who do not. Originally, I had planned to interview eight participants, four who had watched the Shondaland shows and four who had not, having two men and two women in each group³. Of my participants, four were from the US and three were from NZ. Both the NZ participants and the non-Shondaland viewers acted as ‘control’ groups in different ways. Being in NZ made it easier to interview NZers in person, whereas most of the US interviews were conducted over Skype. Another reason I chose to interview NZ and US participants was to be able to potentially compare and contrast their views on race-relations because they would have different lived experiences, even though the media consumption of both groups was very similar, as addressed earlier. The NZ participants show how immersive and global the US racial issues are, as they had much the same knowledge of US race relations and BLM as the US participants; whereas the US participants’ perspectives, who were more likely to have a lived experience with the BLM movement,⁴ meant I would be able to test the para-social contact hypothesis more accurately within my small sample size. If the US participants had friends or knew Black people in their own lives and had positive feelings about BLM then it would be hard to

3 Unfortunately, I could not find another male participant who had watched the Shondaland shows, this issue is explained in chapter three.

4 As this is where the movement originated, but there are Canadian, NZ and Australian chapters now as well.

state the relationship between positive and nuanced Black television characters and empathy for BLM, whereas the NZ participants were less likely to encounter Black (specifically African American) people in their own lives as they make up much less of the NZ population. Thus, mapping the relationship between their para-social contact through television shows and having empathy for BLM or racial issues is clearer. The viewers of the non-Shondaland shows also acted as a form of ‘control’ group; they (mostly) watched white-led television programs and did not have para-social contact with Black characters. It was useful to compare and contrast their attitudes towards BLM with those who have para-social contact with the Shondaland characters, though ultimately these ‘control’ group slices were not fully realised by the interview responses.

My study is unique in two key ways. This is one of the first studies that uses long-form qualitative interviews to interrogate para-social contact hypothesis and viewers’ attitudes toward a minority group. Most other studies that have explored questions of para-social contact hypothesis and attitudes toward minorities have used quantitative surveys to collect the data, which was then analysed using statistical modelling (Bond & Compton, 2015; Schiappa, Gregg & Hewes, 2006; Schiappa, Gregg & Hewes, 2005). By using a qualitative methodology, instead of showing a causal relationship between para-social contact and positive attitudes to minorities as previous studies have, I am instead mapping the way in which white audiences interpellate⁵ the stories and representations in the television shows they watch. This allows me to interpret how this internalisation of particular discourses within the television shows correlates to the viewers’ attitudes toward minority groups. This study is prioritising depth of understanding, i.e. how these viewers make sense of the world and racial issues in particular, rather than using para-social contact hypothesis to find a cause and effect result. The intersectionality of race, gender, sexuality and class did emerge as a theme in my participants interviews. The interaction of the different dimensions of oppression influence each other was an interesting outcome of the interviews, however due to the scope of this thesis, I focussed more on the racial issues. Another way in which this study is unique is that there are few studies that have looked at para-social contact through television audiences and race. Other studies such as Bond & Compton (2015) and Schiappa, Gregg & Hewes (2006 & 2005) looked at representations

⁵ Interpellation is the ‘hailing’ of subjects into particular ideological positions. The concept was made famous by Louis Althusser who borrowed the term from Jacques Lacan. It is interpellation that makes ideologies seem natural and inherent, because when you are interpellated or hailed by a particular ideology, subjects then internalise this ideology, which makes it feel natural (Althusser, 2004; Hall, 1996).

of gay characters and para-social contact, whereas Houlberg (1984) looked at news audiences' para-social contact with news anchors. My study is unique because it investigates the para-social contact of white audiences with Black television characters and, by extension, their views on race relations, variables that have not been studied in this way before.

This thesis is broken into six chapters. The first two chapters, "Post-Racial Television Spaces" and "Race in the United States", are designed to lay the framework for both the literature that is being used in this thesis, and also to map the journey the US have taken to get to this particular 'moment in time'. The US is post-Obama and diversity is more celebrated in the media (television, film and music) than ever, yet they find themselves being governed by a sometimes-racist administration. At the same time, police violence against African-Americans is receiving more backlash and media attention than previously. The third chapter outlines the methodology used in this thesis. It introduces the concept of para-social contact, as well as justifying my use of the qualitative research method of long-form interviews. Chapters four – six unpack the statements and views of my participants. Chapter four's analysis maps out the participants' television consumption, in order to explore the relationship between their consumption and the participants' views on race. In chapter five, I explore how the participants engage with news media and how they frame social issues. The purpose of this chapter was two-fold. First, to know how much they keep up with the news, whether being up to date was essential and what social issues were important to them. The second purpose was to prime the participants for talking about the difficult topics of race and BLM. The final chapter (six) compares the participants' television consumption and their views on race and BLM. Those who did watch more racially diverse television shows were more likely to have a supportive attitude towards BLM, even if they did have some problems with the movement and its activists' actions.

Chapter One: Post-Racial Television Spaces

1.0 – Introduction

This chapter provides the framework for both the television studies literature used in this thesis and offers a selection of highlights of the journey of Black representations on US television, specifically the move to post-racial television. My literature review is broken into several sections: television theory, African American television stories, post-racial ideology in the media, and Shondaland as a contentious post-racial television space.

1.1 – Television: The Cultural Educator

Storytelling is a fundamental element of the human condition. How we make sense of our everyday experiences is through the stories we consume (Hunt, 2015). Images that we see in the media help to shape our worldview and contribute to the construction of our deepest values: good and bad, moral and evil (Kellner, 2003). These images are based on ideologies that shape social structures and institutions, such as race relations and stereotypes (Glenn and Cunningham, 2009). Television is a space in which stories are told. Television (in all its current platforms) also functions as the central cultural forum in our society; it serves as the social space in which we have mediated encounters that diverge from our ordinary lives, where we can vicariously sample our deepest desires or our worst fears, as a space where we can identify with our heroes and distinguish ourselves from the undesirable Others (Hunt, 2005; Kellner, 2003). The growth of communication technologies has meant that there are now a multitude of platforms available to watch television on at whatever time suits the individual (Shimpach, 2010). The constant availability of mass media and communication technologies means that we cannot escape the media's grasp; when we are disconnected from the media sphere we feel slightly less alive (Carey, 2009). We are not, however, always aware of how the media is affecting us.

Television is a pervasive cultural teacher. It contributes to educating us on how to think, feel, behave, fear, desire or believe; it teaches us how to conform to the dominant system of norms and values (Kellner, 2003). Television teaches us these systems through discourse, the mental and social framework that affects the way in which we see the world: it looks and feels natural, like it is merely a reflection of reality (Fiske, 2011; Hall, 1973; Hunt, 2005; Morley, 1992; Shugart, 2006). Discourse is not a reflection of reality, though it is constructed to seem that way. When discourse is deconstructed we are able to reveal

the contradictions that are prevalent in these frameworks. In our society we are immersed in media culture from cradle to grave; it is important to be able to understand, interpret and critique the meanings and messages that we are receiving (Kellner, 2003). Television is also a popular culture institution, recognised as an important site of education about ourselves and others through the representations of gender, race and sexuality (Espostito, 2009; Espostito and Love, 2008; Kellner, 1995; Lipsitz, 1998). These representations do not simply reflect already determined meanings, but they contribute to the creation of those meanings (Espostito, 2009; Hall, 1988).

When an individual watches television they are cued to take a certain ideological position in regard to the representations that they are being exposed to (Hall, 1988). Discourse does privilege a dominant reading of a television text, but this does not mean that a text cannot be read in subordinate ways (Morley, 1992; Hall, 1973). Texts act as sites of struggles for meaning; they reproduce the conflicts of interest between the producers and the consumers of the cultural commodity (Fiske, 2011). Discourses repeatedly become institutionalised, particularly by the media industries, so they are then tacitly accepted by both industry and consumers. Media content about race often contributes to citizens' views on race. Discourse works to establish a particular view on different people, and then the media will reinforce this discourse, which means that individuals will feel that their feelings or opinions about certain groups are justified (Domke, 2001; Kellner, 2003). Discourse also maintains the hegemonic norms of society. These discourses may change and adapt over time; they are unstable. It is important that the attempts to map and analyse discourse must be contextual, geographic and historical (Ouellette and Hay, 2008). By understanding how television works in a discursive and social-cultural context, I will now explain the importance of positive racial television representations.

1.2 – African-American Television Stories

The images that we see on television are based on real aspects of social existence; we need to understand the importance of media-produced racial images to understand the nature of race relations in society. For example, race itself is socially constructed (Haney-Lopez, 1996; Obach, 1999; Omi & Winant, 1986). It has been said that in the US racism is the central underlying ideology in society (Crenshaw, 1988; Nilsen and Turner, 2014). The status of race in mainstream culture has always been intimately bound to the process of

representations within and throughout the mass media (Glenn and Cunningham, 2009; Hall, 1995). Racial stereotyping on television in the US in the past has portrayed Black people negatively (Jhally and Lewis, 2003). Historically, the audience was assumed to be made up of mainly white people. Since it was, and still is, good business practice to not alienate your customers, television shows would always produce content where the white people were in the privileged positions, with Black people as either the villains, or the helpful friend (Kim, 2015). Racial attitudes in the US have changed, from slavery to antebellum segregation, to 1950s and 1960s Civil Rights, to the post-Civil Rights era that followed. Race has played a different role at different times in the US and the representations of Blackness on television (and other media forms) has shifted with the times as well.

There are certain stereotypes of Blackness that are often, even to this day, apparent on television. For Black women, they are often cast into the trope of the Mammy, the Jezebel or the Sapphire (Pixley, 2015). These stereotypical roles were first anthologised by Donald Bogle in his book *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films* (1973). A Mammy, according to Bogle, is a usually large and very dark skinned, often dowdy, but all knowing and all seeing, all understanding mother figure, whose life revolves around nurturing those in the 'Big House' (2001). The Mammy cannot be a threat to the white women, so she must be de-sexed (Bogle, 2001). The Jezebel on the other hand, is the oversexed, seductive Black woman (West, 2008). The Jezebel is threatening to white women, as she will sleep with their white men, so she is always portrayed as the villain (West, 2008). Finally, the Sapphire is the loud and raucous Black woman (Bogle, 2001), the sassy independent Black woman, who has an 'attitude' about everything (West, 2008). This independence is shown as negative, as it threatens men (of all races) because the Sapphire is independent and capable of anything a man can do (Hill Collins, 2004b). The two main stereotypes for Black men on screen are clowns and crooks. Black men either play the fool or are the best friend of the white protagonist (Turner, 2014), or, are crooks, or actual criminals with little to no morals (Bogle, 2001). Black people on television were almost always shown as members of the lower class. Historically, there were few television representations of Black men or women that were perceived positively by audiences.

The first major television production that told an African-American story was *Roots*; which aired as an 8-part miniseries on ABC over 8 consecutive nights in 1977 (Bogle, 2001). It became the most watched television program ever, with 130 million

Americans watching at least one episode (Davison, 1983; Howard et al, 1978). *Roots* was considered ground-breaking when it was released because it was the first time that America saw the horror and actual human cost of slavery on film (PBS, 2016). The mini-series told the story of American history from the perspective of African-Americans. It was based on author Alex Haley's 1976 book, which traced the author's family history from their life in Africa to freedom in America (Bogle, 2001). *Roots* became the topic of national conversation, in schools, offices; according to *Newsweek* it inspired an increase in citizens' requests to trace their family genealogies (Bogle, 2001). Despite its high viewership, *Roots* nearly was not made, as the network executives did not expect white viewers to watch it (Bogle, 2001). When they finally did decide to produce the mini-series, they made sure to use well-known white actors, and feature them in the promos to compensate for the 'unknown' Black faces that made up the majority of the cast that the white audience may not have been familiar with (Bogle, 2001). ABC executive Lou Rudolph, as quoted in Bogle's book *Primetime Blues: African Americans on Network Television* (2001), said, "I think we fooled the audience... because the white stories in most cases were irrelevant, it was a matter of having some white faces particularly in the opening episodes". Not expecting white audiences to want to watch programming featuring African-Americans and, specifically, African-American stories says a lot about the choices television producers make, explaining why there are few dramas that feature a majority African-American cast. Even though *Roots* was such a mainstream hit, it did not have a lasting effect on African-American television programming (Bogle, 2001).

Twenty-five years after *Roots* aired for the first time, came a new series that presented the contemporary structural impact of racism on American society, HBO's *The Wire* (2002-2008) (Nilsen & Turner, 2014). *The Wire*, which is set in the Baltimore, Maryland, narcotics scene and follows both police officers and drug dealers/users, was widely hailed by both critics and academics as exceptional, for its commitment to authentically portraying the Baltimore drug scene and the characters who are a part of it (Bianco, 2008; Kamola, 2015; Nilsen & Turner, 2014). *The Wire* never won an Emmy Award, and always had average to low ratings on the Nielsen scale. The creator of the show, David Simon, attributed lower viewership to the predominately Black cast (Nilsen & Turner, 2014). Much of the praise for *The Wire* comes from its authenticity; David Simon made an effort to cast relatively unknown actors in the roles as well as Baltimore locals, to give the audience a "lived-in atmosphere" (Ault, 2013). The producers and writers also drew from their lived experiences in Baltimore to create characters, plot lines and even

dialogue to add to this atmosphere (Kamola, 2015). The show itself is about social structures and the way institutions and individuals interact within this structure: the criminals, the police, the schools, the media, local government and drug users (Kamola, 2015). These differing groups have their own internal conflicts and these work for and against them when in contention with the other institutions or individuals (Kamola, 2015). Alternatively, in the Shondaland television shows discussed later in this chapter, social structure is not what the shows are about. They are more concerned with the individual characters and their lives and choices, but not the social structures in which they exist. Sometimes societal issues are touched upon, but not usually in a way that is foregrounded, or ‘authentic’ to the real world. Shondaland has been described as more utopian than authentic (Bonilla-Silva & Ashe, 2014). By backgrounding societal issues and focussing more on personal relationships Shondaland fits into the dominant ideology of post-racialism, which means that the shows are subtler in their approach to racial issues; the impact this has on the audience is contentious.

When *The Cosby Show* started in 1984, it was heralded by audiences (especially Black audiences) for finally showing a positive representation of a contemporary Black family on television (Havens, 2000; Jhally and Lewis, 2003). Many scholars have since looked at *The Cosby Show*, specifically how audiences interpret the representation of ‘Blackness’ that the show presented (Jhally and Lewis, 2003; Bogle, 2001; Thornton, 2011; Inniss and Feagin, 1995). The literature on the effect of *The Cosby Show*’s representation of Blackness has been critiqued for its upper middle-classness, which was an unattainable status for most Black Americans (Jhally and Lewis, 2003). The Huxtable family, in their upper middle-classness, represented the values of white middle-class America. The Huxtable’s ‘Blackness’ was subdued; it was shown in the art in their house and the music that they listened to, Blues and RnB rather than Rap or Hip Hop (Havens, 2000). They avoided ghettoized stereotypes of Blackness that were often perceived negatively by audiences (Havens, 2000; Jhally and Lewis, 2003). *The Cosby Show* is often described as an assimilationist television show; assimilationist television is one where a subordinate group takes on the characteristics of the dominant group (Subervi-Velez, 1986). In *The Cosby Show* the Huxtable family represents the idea that middle-class status is achievable for all, no matter a person’s race, creed or gender. This notion provides the backbone for post-race ideology.

1.3 – Post-Racial Ideology in the Media

Post-race is an ideology that assumes that systemic racism is over, and that society at large does not ‘see’ race anymore (Doane, 2014; Esposito, 2009; Griffin, 2011; Thornton, 2011; Warner, 2014). This post-racial ideology must be seen as the outcome of a rhetorical strategy after the 1960s Civil Rights movement in the US, including the use of code words and rhetoric to appease white people who were nervous about the desegregation of Black and white people (Nilsen and Turner, 2014). The post-racial discourse posits that we have moved beyond race and that it does not structure our thoughts or actions anymore (Esposito, 2009); it adopts the view that racism is a static phenomenon, rather than a dynamically changing system of oppression (Bonilla-Silva, 1997). The Civil Rights legislature was thought to erase any racially discriminatory practices against Black Americans, so that any issues that face Black Americans in the present day are of their own doing (Hill Collins, 2004a). The US was deemed a post-racial society when they elected Barack Obama to be the nation’s President, the first Black man to reach this status (Bonilla-Silva and Ashe, 2014, Esposito, 2009, Nilsen and Turner, 2014). The reasoning behind this is that if a Black man can reach the highest office in the world, then the US must have moved on from its racist past. Post-race ideologies are also intertwined with a neo-liberal ideology of individualism, where everyone can achieve success if they just work hard (Esposito, 2009). This ideology directs attention away from structural systems of racism that are rooted in society and puts the blame on individuals (Bonilla-Silva, 1997; Doane, 2014; Esposito, 2009).

The post-racial society sees racism as a thing of the past, arguing society is now free from racial prejudice, preference and discrimination (Bonilla-Silva, 1997; Nilsen and Turner, 2014). Since racism does not matter in a post-racial society, it means that people are not able to talk about racial privilege and injustices (Esposito, 2009). It silences people who are affected by systemic racism, meaning that those people are looked down on because they are blaming the ‘system’ as opposed to taking personal responsibility for their own problems (Bobo et al., 1997; Bonilla-Silva and Ashe, 2014; Doane, 2014; Nilsen and Turner, 2014). By pretending that racism does not exist, it hurts the people that are most affected by systemic racism (Esposito, 2009; Bonilla-Silva and Ashe, 2014). The problem of racism has been flipped; no longer are the white majority racist, but rather, the racial minorities are clinging to a culture of victimisation and trying to make white people feel guilty (Kim, 2002). This switching of racism from a system of oppression to individualised

occurrences, and placing the blame on the racial minorities themselves, allows the white majority to use the ideology of colour-blindness to rid themselves of guilt. The current assumption of post-racial ideology is that everyone is born with equal opportunities, and therefore everyone has an equal chance in life; the discourse ignores the fact that people come from different social locations and histories that are not all equal (Rodriquez, 2006).

This post-racial idea is presented as true, through a few examples of racial minorities who have achieved a high level of success (Peck, 2014), notably Oprah Winfrey. Winfrey is now the richest African American of the twentieth century, with her various companies, and became a household name with her daytime talk show, *The Oprah Winfrey Show* (Miller, 2009). Oprah is the epitome of a post-racial figure. She was born in Mississippi before the Civil Rights movement, where Black people could be killed for trying to vote. Oprah's parents were teenagers, and her father left her mother when he found out that she was pregnant. Oprah lived much of her childhood with her grandparents, was raped by a cousin when she was 9 and was pregnant by the time she was 14. Her early life was traumatic, but Oprah still managed to succeed. She got her first job as a newscaster in Nashville, Tennessee, and her life only improved from there (Harris, 2005). She worked hard and tirelessly, and she succeeded when everything was against her: she was Black, female and poor. Oprah is often put up as proof that you just need to work hard to succeed in life, and that a person's background does not matter (Espostito, 2009). Oprah herself asserts the same ideology, she once stated that "Race is not an issue. It has never been an issue with me ... Truth is, I've never felt prevented from doing anything because I was either Black or a woman" (Richman, 1987). By making clear that she was free of racial resentment, Oprah made herself more appealing to the white audience who made up the majority of her television audience (Peck, 2014). Oprah often would talk about hating the 'victim' mentality, espousing the familiar post-racial discourse that racism is over, that everyone is born with the ability to succeed and that race is not an obstacle preventing anyone from succeeding (Peck, 2014). Colour-blindness has played an important role in deflecting attention away from systemic racism, particularly inequities of material resources and political power. It has made race an individualised problem, instead promoting personal responsibility (Peck, 2014).

The backbone of post-racial ideology is the notion of personal responsibility; instead of blaming the 'system', a person's wealth or status is directly linked to personal success or failure in adapting to the free market (Peck, 2014). This neo-liberal ideology supports meritocracy, which is the recognition of individual merit i.e. anyone of any

background is able to achieve the ‘American Dream’ (Espostito, 2009). By practising the discourse of meritocracy, it only leaves one system of inequality, the market-place. The market-place does not discriminate against race, gender or class; it is meant to support those who work hard (Peck, 2014). This discourse does not reflect the real lives of many people from various subjugated groups, as there are many obstacles that stand in the way of being able to ‘work hard’ in the marketplace, such as access to education. This neoliberal approach to race adapts modes of racial power; race is meant to disappear, while whiteness persists. White privilege does not disappear with the notion of colour-blindness, but it becomes submerged within racial consciousness (Mukherjee, 2014).

Another way of phrasing this neo-liberal racial discourse is laissez-faire racism; this ideology is similar to the other facets of post-racial ideology that I have already discussed. Laissez-faire racism is where there is consistent negative stereotyping of Black people, blaming Black people themselves for the Black-white socio-economic divide (Bobo et al., 1997). Laissez-faire is used to differentiate this kind of racism as more loosely structured, complex and permeable, rather than the legislated racism pre-1960s of Jim Crow, segregation and slavery (Bobo et al., 1997). We can connect laissez-faire racism with the notion of meritocracy, as they both blame the individual for their failures rather than accepting that the power structures in society privilege white people over people of all other ethnicities. Both ideologies direct attention away from white privilege and ignore larger societal issues of inequality (Espostito, 2009). By accepting these ideologies as a natural progression from the racist past, it is detrimental to social justice goals, as these ideologies ignore the fact that there are any issues present (Espostito, 2009).

1.4 – Shondaland – A post-racial television space?

Shonda Rhimes is the founder of the television production company, Shondaland. Rhimes produces the three television shows used as the basis of analysis in this thesis, *Grey’s Anatomy*, *Scandal*, and *How to Get Away with Murder*. Rhimes is a Black woman, and has achieved unparalleled success for a Black, female creator in the television industry (Erigha, 2015). She owns Thursday nights on ABC with her ‘Thank God It’s Thursday’ line-up, which alternatively could be called Thank God It’s Shondaland, since she is the producer of all the shows in the primetime line up. In her auto-biography *Year of Yes* (2015), Rhimes describes herself as an F.O.D; First. Only. Different. This moniker refers to people like herself who are able to achieve great things while being Black, Asian,

female, deaf, gay, or belonging to any other disadvantaged group (Rhimes, 2015). An F.O.D has extra responsibility, whether they want it or not: if they fail then it means that a generation of women, Black people, Asian people or gay people will miss out on fair and complex representations in the media (Rhimes, 2015).

Rhimes has often commented on diversity in Hollywood, a subject interviewers ask her about regularly because of the nature of the casting processes in her television shows. On many occasions she has commented about how much she hates having to talk about the question of diversity. In 2005, after the success of the first season of *Grey's Anatomy*, Rhimes stated in an interview, “my friends and I don't sit around and discuss race ... we're post-Civil Rights, post-feminist babies, and we take it for granted we live in a diverse world” (Fogel, 2005). Rhimes did not grow up living through the struggles that face many Black members of society. Both her parents were college educated and work at universities; her mother has a PhD and her father an MBA. She grew up in a middle-class family in Chicago and attended Dartmouth College, an Ivy League school. Due to her upbringing, she was afforded more opportunities, such as attending an Ivy League university, than if she had grown up lower-class like 27.4% of African Americans in the US. White Americans, comparatively, have a poverty rate of 9.9% (Economic Policy Institute, 2016). This relatively privileged background means that she has a specific world-view that lends itself to post-racial ideology.

Rhimes has stated that all she had to do was work hard to achieve her goals; for Rhimes her sex and race were not barriers. Rhimes articulated this idea in a speech she gave for the *Hollywood Reporter – Power Women* event, about women in entertainment: “If I had broken through a glass ceiling, I would have felt some cuts... some bruises... I'd be bleeding, I'd have wounds.” (Rhimes, 2015). Rhimes' comment refers to the imagined glass ceiling that is an invisible barrier preventing women and other minorities from advancing in their careers and in society as a whole. Rhimes is often considered someone who has broken through the glass ceiling because of her success while being Black and female. In this speech she is trying to give back the credit to all the women and Black creators who came before her and put cracks in that glass ceiling. She never felt that she had to struggle more than any white man to get her shows on the air. Because of the hard work and sacrifice of people representing disadvantaged groups in the past who broke the ceiling for her, she does not feel she had any particular barriers to break through. This denial of such barriers is an assertion of a post-racial discourse by Rhimes and is reflective of her television shows as well. When she received an award at the *Hollywood Reporter*

event she argued that the award was simply for ‘participation’, because Rhimes does not feel that she has been doing anything special or different (Rhimes, 2015).

Although Rhimes often states that she has not done, and is not doing, anything particularly special or important with the characters in her television shows, many others think she is. In Rhimes’ eyes all she is doing is creating complex, three-dimensional characters of colour, because people of colour do live three-dimensional, complex lives (Rhimes, 2015). She writes all her characters as people, no matter their gender, sexuality, or race because that is how she sees the world. Famously, during the casting process for *Grey’s Anatomy*, she did not write last names, or physical descriptions of any of the characters, leaving the door open for actors of any race to audition for whichever role they wanted. This casting process is called colour-blind casting. The *New York Times* described the world that Rhimes created in *Grey’s Anatomy* as one where “color is more description than definition” (Fogel, 2005). Fogel calls this approach “fresh for network television” (2005). This was a big move in 2005 when *Grey’s Anatomy* first aired; Rhimes in her memoir talks about how she had to fight for Sandra Oh (who plays Cristina Yang) to be cast in the role of the title character’s best friend. The rest of the casting directors and ABC executives were all pushing for a certain white actress to play the role of Cristina, before Oh had even auditioned, but Rhimes did not want to cast the white actress in that role (Rhimes, 2015). With the casting of a Korean-Canadian actress in the role of the super smart, super competitive doctor, some criticised Rhimes that the casting was just stereotypical. Oh responded to this criticism, stating that these roles are only stereotypical because they generally only have three lines, so the characters never get to develop further (Fogel, 2005). Rhimes’ only rule of the colour-blind casting process is that they cannot cast Black actors in the roles of drug dealers or pimps, because she does not want to feed the stereotype (Fogel, 2005). It is clear that Rhimes is aware of racial stereotypes and makes active choices to avoid presenting these in her shows in order to produce a colour-blind, post-racial universe. This decision does create a tension, because by making an active choice not to hire Black actors for the roles of drug dealers or pimps, she is making a race-based choice for these roles. This has been argued as the difference in popularity between *The Wire* and *Grey’s Anatomy* (which had the higher viewership), both of which began in the early 2000s. While *The Wire* showed an ‘authentic’ image of Black drug dealers and single mothers, *Grey’s Anatomy* shows a positive utopian view of Blackness, where everyone is successful and no one notices race (Bonilla-Silva & Ashe, 2014).

Shondaland is not only the name of a successful production company, but a space where friendships grow, and where race, gender and sexuality do not matter. In regard to race, most of the cast have made comments through their various social media accounts about current racial issues facing non-white Americans in the US. Most notably, Jesse Williams (Jackson Avery on *Grey's Anatomy*), is a human rights activist and recently produced a documentary on the BLM movement called *Stay Woke: The Black Lives Matter Movement*. For this documentary and other activist work, he received the BET Humanitarian Award. His acceptance speech at this award show was both praised and criticised. In it he thanked his family and dedicated the award to all the real organisers and activists on the ground dealing with problems of racism daily. He then spoke of victims of police brutality such as Tamir Rice, Eric Garner and Sandra Bland. Towards the end of the five-minute speech, Williams said, “if you have no interest in equal rights for Black people then do not make suggestions to those who do. Sit down.” (Williams, 2016). He is referring to those who do not realise or believe the extent of the systemic racism that exists in US society. Four days after this speech, a change.org petition was created to get Jesse Williams fired from *Grey's Anatomy* and to boycott the ABC Network until this happened. The rationale for this petition is explained on the change.org page:

Jesse Williams released a cascade of inappropriate, unprofessional and racist commentary against police officers and Caucasians... Shonda Rhimes praised Jesse's speech on Twitter... This is a blatant slap in the face to the entire human race. Shonda not only praised him, but she condones his actions... She...chooses to be a hypocrite. She's fired other people for less infractions (Smith, 2016).

This petition can be seen as a call to Rhimes to properly represent her post-racial discursive space. If the US is post-racial, then Jesse Williams should not have anything to be complaining about. The petition could be considered part of the conservative post-racial discourse, ignoring the real problem of racial tension in the US, because the discourse assumes that racial tension dissipated after the Civil Rights movement. The support of Rhimes for Williams can be seen as a break in the post-racial discourse that Shondaland is meant to reinforce. Though this event did not occur in the canon of the Shondaland television show universe, the use of social media by almost all cast members during the airing of the shows and at other occasions means that the Shondaland audience also sees the actors themselves as part of the Shondaland canon, and representative of Shondaland at all times.

For her role as Annalise Keating in *How to Get Away with Murder*, Viola Davis became the first Black actress to win an Emmy for Outstanding Actress in a Drama Series. In her acceptance speech Davis quoted Harriet Tubman, a leading abolitionist before the American Civil War; Davis then went on to say in connection to the Tubman quote, that the only thing that separates white women from women of colour is opportunity (Davis, 2015b). She later in the speech thanked Rhimes, among other writers, for giving opportunities to Black women in television. There was little dissent in the public after Davis's speech, perhaps because she did not directly reference any on-going social or political issues for Black people; instead, simply referring to the importance of diverse media representations which is a less contentious issue for most people. Davis has said that she took the television role because she felt that the character of Annalise would allow for a different definition of Black womanhood to be portrayed by her on screen (Birnbaum, 2015). This attitude towards the role and the Shondaland world is post-racial. Davis went for this role, because it was not one that would normally go to a "49-year-old, dark skinned, African American woman" (Davis, 2015a). Post-racial discourse is at play here because they are celebrating the colour-blindness of the casting; the character of Annalise Keating is messy, mysterious and sexualised, a character that would usually be played by a younger, whiter actress.

1.5 – Conclusion

This chapter has set up the literature on the role and importance of television as a cultural educator and has offered a selection of highlights from the history of Black representation on US television. The description and explanation of Shondaland as a post-racial space is important for understanding why I have chosen to interview white viewers of these three shows. The impact Shondaland has had on US culture, and the activism of cast members, is important for the later chapters where the participants interpellate different meanings, coming to different conclusions on race relations and Shondaland television shows. The next chapter provides both the historical and social context that brought about the BLM movement, as well as addressing the rhetoric that attempts to delegitimise the movement.

Chapter Two: Race in the United States

2.0 – Introduction

This chapter attempts to provide a recent cultural context, using secondary samples, for the BLM movement. The partial nature of history from the outside prevents me from writing a full and varied history of race and racism in the US, instead by using selected examples this chapter seeks to provide context for BLM and some of the events referred to by interview participants. It has been split into two sections, pre-Obama (pre-2008) and post-Obama (2008 onwards). I have done this as some theorists, such as Bonilla-Silva and Ashe (2014) argue that there is a common notion that Obama's election as President put racism firmly in the past and made the US a post-racial nation; this is not the case. The post-racial myth is being disrupted by groups like BLM, who attest that racism is embedded in US social structures and institutions and is not merely performed by a couple of racist individuals. The first section – Pre-Obama – covers the Civil Rights Act of 1964, affirmative action, the media coverage of O.J. Simpson's murder trial in the 1990s and finishes with a discussion of the political and media response to Hurricane Katrina in 2005, which is a time when future President, Barack Obama, first received media attention. The second section – Post-Obama – talks about the post-racial myth created when Obama became president, and how it works discursively in the media. It also explains the rise of the BLM movement, and of President Donald Trump, who was mentioned several times by participants in regard to several of his racist comments and policy plans.

2.1 – Pre-Obama (Pre-2008)

Since the onset of modernity race has offered variable modes of social ordering, state arrangement and interpersonal relation (Goldberg, 2015). The logic of white supremacy was premised equally on the inherent inferiority of Blacks and the superiority of whites. This ideological position was reproduced through discourses of science, religion and the humanities (Crenshaw, 1997). In the US, due to the position of Black people in America as slaves until the abolition of slavery in 1865 by President Lincoln, Black Americans have suffered as second-class citizens. During the 1950s and 1960s both Black and white Americans protested for equal Civil Rights of Black Americans; they managed to get the legal desegregation of schools, buses, and public places, while eventually, in 1964 President Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act, which made it illegal to discriminate

against a person based on their race, colour, sex, religion or national origin. However, this formal racial equality was unable to disrupt the deep historical and cultural patterns of Black subordination (Crenshaw, 1997). In the years and decades following the Civil Rights Act the preferred American ideology was one of colour-blindness. Crenshaw argues that there is a gap between this colour-blind ideology and racial power that are most evident in criminal justice, interracial sex and at the intersection of the two (1997). Colour-blindness was prominently assumed in the liberal vision of racial reform (Crenshaw, 1997). This preferred ideology was embraced by both the liberals and the conservatives in the US with varying degrees and interpretations. The liberals, on the one hand, use a post-racial discourse as a positive tactic of anti-racism, and support a notion of assimilationism, i.e. that everyone is the same no matter what colour or race you are. The conservatives on the other hand, use a post-racial discourse as a racist strategy to deny race and expressions of racial difference or inequalities that are still present in the US today. Both of these approaches to race assume that whiteness is a neutral category that all people should aspire to. By neutralising non-white people, it also neutralises their cultural heritage and different experiences.

While legal equality and a combination of race-conscious programs, such as affirmative action, produced a rather sizeable Black middle class in the 1970s, these programs were abandoned before a major transformation of institutional and structural power could take place (Crenshaw, 1997). In 1965, President Johnson signed Executive Order 11246 which enacted affirmative action into law; the language stated that the government and private contractors must give equal opportunity to all areas of employment and must not discriminate against people based on their race, colour, religion or creed in their employment decisions (Department of Labour, 2017). The effects of this Executive Order increased over the years to include quotas, goals and timetables for employers and educational institutions alike (Dumbrell, 1988). In the 1980s the Reagan administration withdrew its support for affirmative action programs (Dumbrell, 1988; Finn, 1982). The Reagan Justice Department argued that affirmative action was in contradiction with the language of the fifth and fourteenth constitutional amendments, as well as titles of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which deal with discrimination in employment and education (Dumbrell, 1988). By twisting the narrative of affirmative action to one of positive discrimination, the Reagan administration appropriated the legal stance that affirmative action only applied in individual cases, where a specific person experienced a specific instance of discrimination and that specific individuals would be eligible for

compensation (Dumbrell, 1988). The switching of the narrative from one of structural and institutional racial reform to individualised instances of discrimination could be read as the first major instance of a neo-liberal ideology becoming the preferred ideology in US society. In response to the Reagan-era anti-affirmative action, Civil Rights leader Rev. Jesse Jackson wrote an op-ed in the *Chicago Tribune* which argued that the Reagan administration used affirmative action as the scapegoat for the loss of US jobs which had not gone to “Blacks, Hispanics and women” but instead had gone overseas to Taiwan, Mexico and South Korea (Jackson, 1985). By placing the blame on individuals rather than the structure of society at large, the US federal government was able to advance neo-liberal policies of deregulation and free trade, which led to the loss of American jobs in manufacturing, as they were sent overseas where labour was cheaper. The expansion of global systems of trade and manufacturing has accelerated with neo-liberal policies of deregulation and transnational free trade (Kotz, 2002). The removal of affirmative action and emphasis on individualism and the permeation of neo-liberal ideology throughout society in the 1980s coincided with the rise of Black celebrities and sporting personalities. These Black celebrities and sporting personalities exemplified meritocracy when they got themselves ‘out of the ghetto’; [examples include] celebrities like Michael Jackson, Bill Cosby, Eddie Murphy and sports stars like Michael Jordan, Magic Johnson and OJ Simpson.

In June 1994 in the midst of the OJ Simpson murder trial, the cover of *Time Magazine* featured OJ Simpson’s police mugshot. The same week, *Newsweek* also published a cover featuring Simpson’s mugshot. The difference between the two covers was that *Time* had altered the shot and darkened Simpson’s skin and suit. Many criticised this as having racial undertones, that by making Simpson’s skin darker, this also made him appear more menacing and criminal. The then managing editor of *Time* stated that no racial implication was intended, but instead that it was an artist’s interpretation of the mugshot (Carmody, 1994). Mainstream commentators, in the lead up to the trial, would often comment that because most white people viewed Simpson, not as an African American, but as race-neutral, he would receive a fair trial (Crenshaw, 1997). The mainstream media assumed that if white people read Simpson as a Black man, then he would be more likely to be viewed as guilty. During the infamous trial, *The People vs Orenthal James Simpson*, Simpson’s lead attorney, Johnnie Cochrane, deployed the ‘race card’ (Lipsitz, 1997). Kimberlé W. Crenshaw argues that using the metaphor of a ‘race card’ presumes a social space in which race does not exist until it is ‘illegitimately’ introduced (1997). This

framework keeps racism as a historical artefact, useful only to show a difference in time (Crenshaw, 1997).

In the time before the murders, Simpson embodied the neo-liberal narrative of pulling yourself up by the bootstraps; he was born in the projects in San Francisco and became a good college student, dedicated husband, a sports superstar and brand spokesperson (Johnson & Roediger, 1997). Simpson kick-started his super stardom in 1968 before he had even been drafted into an NFL team. 1968 was a year in which Black activism was high, especially in California where Simpson lived. The Black Panthers were under heavy police investigation; Muhammed Ali had just been jailed for speaking out against and refusing to be drafted in the Vietnam War; during the Summer Olympics that year, sprinters Tommie Smith (who won gold) and John Carlos (bronze) both famously used the Black Power salute while standing on the podium for the 200m sprint; and the Australian, Peter Norman (silver), wore an American Black Civil Rights pin in support. Both Americans received a life-time barring from the Olympic games for this action, and Norman was left off the Australian Olympic team in 1972 as a result (Johnson & Roediger, 1997). Simpson, alternatively, remained somewhat apolitical. He denounced the Olympic protests, and if he had feelings about the Vietnam War he did not express them publicly; this allowed Simpson, a physically imposing Black man, to seem unthreatening to the white majority public (Johnson & Roediger, 1997). This, along with a movement to call out racist adverts, meant that advertisers needed more diversity, but not so much that the white majority of American consumers would not feel othered – Simpson was a practical and willing choice. He himself knew that his football career would not be long, as he had joint problems, so had always set his sights higher, to celebrity and stardom (Johnson & Roediger, 1997). Years later this all fell to pieces following the murder trial, where he became re-raced (Lipstiz, 1997).

Further, when Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans (among other cities) in the last week of August 2005, it did not just ruin lives and destroy property, but also put some cracks into the façade of the colour-blind discourse that was prominent in US society at the time (Giroux, 2006). Hurricane Katrina displaced two million (mainly Black, sick and elderly) people (Giroux, 2006; Hartman & Squires, 2006). When images of the disaster were played on television, most people were left uncertain with how to comprehend the disproportionate number of Black and poor communities who were most affected (Powell et al., 2006). The mainstream media tried to make the issue of the crisis about class and poverty over race, ignoring the reality behind why African Americans are more likely to be

poor than white Americans (Powell et al., 2006). Before Katrina, New Orleans was characterised by extreme levels of poverty and racially segregated neighbourhoods; in the lead up to the hurricane, those who had the means to evacuate did so, getting plane or train tickets out of the city, or driving themselves out of town (Hartman & Squires, 2006). Those who did not have the means happened to be the majority Black community who lived in the central city where the flooding was the most severe (Hartman & Squires, 2006). While it may seem like a jump to blame the effects of a natural disaster on politics and the social reality of systemic racism, Henry Giroux (2006) argues that this is, in fact, the case. Giroux contends that the Bush administration, with its small government neo-liberal ideology, cut funding not only to welfare schemes⁶ but also to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), which is the agency given the task to “prepare for, protect against, respond to, recover from and mitigate all hazards” (FEMA, 2017). This increased the number of those affected by the hurricane. FEMA was placed under the Department of Homeland Security during its downsizing in 2003, and its role in disaster planning was made subordinate to the Bush administration’s fetish for fighting terrorists (Giroux, 2006; FEMA, 2017).

The question of whether President Bush was simply racist or just incompetent began to become part of the discourse surrounding Hurricane Katrina. Black leaders, such as rapper Kanye West, famously said “George Bush doesn’t care about Black people” at the *Concert for Hurricane Relief* on September 2nd, 2005 (A Concert for Hurricane Relief, 2005). In part West’s comment could be related to the fact that President Bush opted just to do a flyover over New Orleans, rather than going down to the ground and speaking to those most affected. West, who is known for being outspoken about the way that African Americans are treated, took Bush’s government inaction as being shaped by a racial bias. This flyover also caused another Black leader to call out President Bush; then Senator, Barack Obama. Senator Obama went to New Orleans in the days after the Hurricane to help out on the ground; he also committed to taking 10,000 displaced people into his state of Illinois (Obama, 2005). In a speech to the Senate when he came back from New Orleans he called out the government, for their “unconscionable ineptitude” (Obama, 2005). Later in the speech, Obama states that he, “does not subscribe to the notion that painfully slow response... was racially based... ineptitude was colour-blind.” (2005). This use of the colour-blind position, sets him up to be an unthreatening Black man; so that he could

6 Which added 1.1 million to the 36 million already on the poverty roll

appeal to as many (white) people as possible to want to help the poor, Black people in New Orleans. In the way that O.J. Simpson kept his politics neutral, to appeal to the white majority of the population, Obama kept his position on race politics within the ideology of colour-blindness, at least publicly. West received backlash for his comments about Bush being racist, but before he even said that, he spoke about how the media portrayed the Black and white victims of the Hurricane and subsequent flooding differently; the Black people were looters and the whites were just looking for food (A Concert for Hurricane Relief, 2005). This take on how the media was representing hurricane/flood victims was lost in the reaction from the Bush comment; President Bush later said that West's comment was the lowest point of his Presidency (Chappell, 2010). Considering Bush's Presidency also included the 9/11 attacks, and a war in Iraq as well as other domestic issues, it seems dramatic to say that being called a racist was the low point of his presidency, but perhaps it highlights the importance of race relations in the US.

2.2 – Post-Obama (Post-2008)

“In the beginning, Obama created the heavens and the earth and America became a nation no longer divided by race.” (Bonilla-Silva and Ashe, 2014). The US post-racial society is said to have been born when Barack Obama was elected President in 2008 (Goldberg, 2015, Bonilla-Silva and Ashe, 2014). It was with this election that the concept of post-raciality went public (Goldberg, 2015). The rationale was, that if a Black man could reach the highest office in the land, then race must not matter anymore. Obama encouraged this discourse with his ‘A More Perfect Union’ speech, otherwise known as ‘The Race Speech’, which he gave in Philadelphia in March 2008 during his first presidential race. In the speech he states, “We can tackle race only as spectacle - as we did in the OJ trial - or in the wake of tragedy, as we did in the aftermath of Katrina - or as fodder for the nightly news” (Obama, 2008). He goes on to explain that talking about race in this way is just a distraction from the real policy positions that the candidates have, which are the things that can actually affect people's lives. He talks about race as a more historical issue, rather than current; he would prefer to talk about policies like welfare and education, that would allow all Americans to have an equal opportunity. The post-racial ideology in the US is not static, but continually evolves to meet changing social and political circumstances, as it did when Obama was elected, but then again changed after his first term, with rates of racial prejudice higher than during his election in 2008 (Harris, 2012).

There is a tension in US society between overt displays of racism, which are generally denounced, while code words and other tactics of racial rhetoric are used covertly (Doane, 2014). By using subtle rhetoric many private citizens, as well as public figures, are able to get away with their discriminatory views without causing offence to the general public, but just to those who are the targets of the coded statements.

The US media, both liberal and conservative, liked to impress upon their respective audiences the post-racial discourse through the above mentioned rhetorical devices. On the one hand liberal media uses post-racial discourse as a positive tactic of anti-racism, and as assimilationism. Conservative media, on the other hand, uses post-racial discourse as a racist strategy to deny race and expressions of the racial inequalities that still exist in the US today. An example of this conservative media post-racial attitude can be seen in a segment of *Fox & Friends* on February 8th, 2016, critiquing Beyoncé's performance at the Super Bowl 50 half-time show. The hosts of *Fox & Friends* and their guest, Rudy Giuliani, critique Beyoncé's use of Black Panther iconography during the performance, as well as the lyrics and meaning behind the song she performed, "Formation". Of her performance, one host, Brian Kilmeade, says

I couldn't really make out what Beyoncé was saying but at the end we find out that Beyoncé dressed up in a tribute to the Black Panthers, went to a Malcolm X formation, and the song, the lyrics, which I couldn't make out a syllable, were basically telling cops to stop shooting Blacks.
(Fox News, 2016)

While there were some comments that there were issues with the audio during the halftime show, they were only during Coldplay's part of the performance (D'Addario, 2016). By commenting that he "couldn't make out a syllable" of Beyoncé's performance, Kilmeade is using what Eduardo Bonilla-Silva calls 'racial grammar'. Bonilla-Silva describes racial grammar as the distillation of racial ideology, and as grammar constructs the rules of language, racial grammar constructs the rules, as such, of talking about race, either directly or indirectly. Racial grammar helps to shape "in significant ways how we see or don't see race in social phenomena, how we frame matters as racial or not race-related" (p.174) and it normalises white supremacy as the standard (Bonilla-Silva, 2012).

When Kilmeade says that he “can’t make out” what Beyoncé was saying, he is, in a subtle way, saying that the voice of a successful Black woman does not matter. Kilmeade also states that the lyrics of “Formation” are about cops shooting Black people, which is untrue; the lyrics do not once mention shooting, guns or police officers. However, to give Kilmeade some credit, the music video for “Formation” does express sentiment for the ‘BLM’ movement and shows interactions between police officers and Black youths. The music video for “Formation” was released a day before the Super Bowl performance so that may be what Kilmeade meant, but his phrasing is problematic.

On the other hand, the liberal media expresses a different post-racial discourse. This can be seen in a segment of *Real Time with Bill Maher* from 12 February 2016, where Maher and his panellists talk about the same Beyoncé performance. Maher segues into the conversation by saying “Well, speaking of white people thinking they’re under attack” (HBO, 2016): this statement is saturated in irony. Maher then shows a clip of Beyoncé’s performance and states “Now to me, watching that it just looks like every other halftime show I’ve ever seen” (HBO, 2016). He then launches into how the ‘right-wing’ viewed this performance as a political attack on their right to whiteness. This positioning of the piece places Maher as a post-racial figure who does not see the political and racial statement that Beyoncé was making. Maher’s post-racial position here is seen as positive because of the assumed colour-blindness. This position is problematic. By choosing to ignore the political statement that Beyoncé was trying to make about police and state violence⁷ against Black people, Maher ignores these issues altogether. While he does not claim that this performance was an attack on whiteness, he does not move out of his seat of white privilege to empathise with the situation that many Black Americans are living in. The one Black panellist on his show that evening was Michael ‘Killer Mike’ Render (a hip-hop and rap recording artist) who said, as a counter to Maher, “white people, that conversation wasn’t even for you” (HBO, 2016), and explains how the first verse of the song is about Beyoncé loving her Blackness. He also brings up the political messages about the BLM movement in the music video for “Formation”, specifically a wall that says, “Don’t Shoot Us” (HBO, 2016).

The BLM movement was born as a hashtag on Twitter in 2013 after George Zimmerman was acquitted for the murder of unarmed Black teenager, Trayvon Martin,

⁷ The music video for Formation makes references to imagery from Hurricane Katrina

who was walking through Zimmerman's neighbourhood (Black Lives Matter, 2017). The movement did not truly come to life until the killing of Black teenager Michael Brown by police officer Darren Wilson in Ferguson, Missouri, in 2014 (Rickford, 2016). According to the group's website, BLM is "Rooted in the experiences of Black people in this country who actively resist our dehumanization, #BlackLivesMatter is a call to action and a response to the virulent anti-Black racism that permeates our society" (Black Lives Matter, 2017). The BLM is concerned not just with state driven, police violence against Black people, but also the way in which Black people in America are more likely to be living in poverty, incarcerated and how disabled Black Americans are used in state-sponsored Darwinian experiments (Black Lives Matter, 2017). Their tagline, "This is not a moment, but a movement" underpins their notion that their group is not concerned wholly with a couple of high-profile Black deaths at the hands of white police officers, but the fixed, underlying, historical circumstances and structures that have led to this moment, and the different ways that the state enacts violence on Black Americans (Black Lives Matter, 2017). One of the biggest critiques of BLM is that they do not emulate the non-violent protest style of 1960s Civil Rights movement (Hooker, 2016). Historically speaking, the non-violent Civil Rights protests have been romanticised as the only form of protest that lead to change; the other Civil Rights groups around at the time have been delegitimised as thuggish and a distraction to the cause run by Dr King (Hooker, 2016). This historical narrative then creates a notion that the only legitimate way to gain rights or equality in some form is to do so through non-violent or non-disruptive protest (Hooker, 2016). With this, when groups like the BLM gather in large numbers, and then crime occurs, they blame the entire group and try to delegitimise them as thugs, rather than listening to what their concerns are and why they feel the need to protest.

The anti-post-racial ideology of the BLM movement has received some backlash, primarily from those on the conservative side of American media and politics. They have called members of the BLM movement 'race hustlers'. A 'race hustler' is a person who blames white privilege, an unfair society and a terrible country for the problems that face Black people in America (The O'Reilly Factor, 2014). Those in the conservative media who use the term 'race hustler' express a need for a revolution of responsibility of self and ignore or simply do not understand the societal and historic structures that make it harder for African Americans to succeed in the competitive market that is American society. 'Race hustler' is a loaded term. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, a hustler is defined as a person who is skilful at aggressive selling or illicit dealing. The use of the

term hustler in African American hip-hop and rap music by artists such as 50 Cent, Cassidy, Ice T, Lil Wayne and Beyoncé, creates a connotation between the term hustler and poor Black neighbourhoods, the consumption and dealing of drugs and prostitution. These activities are usually seen as negative activities as they do not support productive ways of belonging to society, so the term hustler generally has negative connotations. A 'race hustler' describes a person who is trying to advance Black opportunity and status, through the naming of racist events, situations or commentary. By this definition, Civil Rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. could be described as a race hustler, but instead he is almost always touted as a hero and as an example of how to protest, both legitimately and in a way that causes change. 'Race hustler' is used almost exclusively to delegitimise Black activists who are voicing their concerns on racial issues or support for groups like BLM. So, for right-wing commentators, 'race hustler' is a specific rhetorical tool that they wield for their own ideological ends.

'Race hustler' is not the only piece of rhetoric that is used by the right in America to detract from those they oppose. During the US election of 2016, the winning candidate, now President Donald Trump, used – and still uses – a deluge of different, easily chantable, rhetorical devices. One of his first campaign promises was to build a wall on the Mexico-US border to stop the illegal immigration of Mexicans, who are, according to Trump "...bringing drugs... bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people." (2015). By using stereotypical and negative rhetoric about a group on the first day of his campaign, he foreshadowed how negative the rest of his campaign was to become. Trump often uses racial minorities (Hispanics, African-Americans and Muslims) as scapegoats for the economic and social problems that face the US; blaming issues such as inner-city crime, drugs and terrorism on these three racial groups. By blaming these minority groups, he appealed to those white people in low socio-economic positions who have been hardest hit by the changing global economy, whereby manufacturing jobs are moved overseas to countries where labour is cheaper (as begun in the 1980s under Reagan). However, by positioning non-white groups of people as the cause for this loss of employment, it shifts the blame from those in power who move the jobs overseas, to others in the same low socio-economic position, who are also losing their jobs or having to work for a lower wage. In the general election, Trump won votes from two-thirds of white people without a college education (Tyson and Maniam, 2016); those without a college education also happen to have a lower median household income and are more likely to be living in poverty (Fry, 2013).

On the night of the election, once it became clear that Trump was the winner, *CNN* commentator Van Jones, spoke of Trump's success as a 'whitelash'. A 'whitelash' refers to a white backlash against "a changing country, a whitelash against a Black president..." (*CNN*, 2016). Jones reiterated that during the evening the other commentators had spoken about income, class and region but not race as a divisive issue that could cause people to vote one way or another. The divisive language used by Trump during his campaign against Mexicans and Muslims, as well as his decision to not disavow white supremacists' and David Duke's (ex-leader of the Ku Klux Klan) support of his campaign, made race an issue in this campaign. Prior to his campaign Trump was a leader of the Birther movement, which set about to prove that President Obama was not born in the US and therefore not eligible to be President. In 2011 Trump stated that he sent investigators to Hawaii to try and discover the 'truth' of Obama's birth (Mooney, 2011). Even after Obama released his certificate of live birth, which states his birthplace as Honolulu, Hawaii in 2008, the Birther movement could not accept that a man whose middle name is Hussein could be an American (Hughey, 2012). After President Obama released his long form birth certificate in April 2011, Trump took it as a personal victory, claiming on Twitter in June 2014 that "...I was the one who got Obama to release his birth certificate, or whatever that was!" (Trump, 2014). The Birther movement has been denounced for its racist overtones; it has been considered yet another example of racial profiling whereby non-white people are often faced with questions about their social belonging (Hughey, 2012).

The Birther movement could be considered a 'whitelash' against Obama's first election to President. In Matthew Hughey's analysis of online comments on articles from the *New York Times* and *The Washington Post* that relate to Birtherism, he found that the comments often related to a 'crisis' of whiteness and a denial that Birtherism had anything to do with race. Hughey arranged the comments into 12 narratives which included among others: Affirmative Action President, Overt Othering, Free Speech and Political Correctness, Insanity and Ignorance, A Post-Racial World. The narratives he explicated from the comments show this 'crisis' of whiteness, whereby political correctness, affirmative action and fear of being called a racist (which some commenters did call the Birthers) came through clearly. Hughey argues that there is a strong relationship between citizenship and whiteness in the US, as well as a fear of outsiders. He quotes statistics from a number of polls and surveys that state that a substantial number of Americans had at least doubts, if not a full assertion, that Obama was not born in the US. This 'crisis' of whiteness, and potentially feelings of being cheated out of a legitimate president is

something that Trump tapped into throughout his campaign⁸. This use of the discourse of white ‘crisis’ can also be seen in his support for ‘Blue Lives Matter’.

At the Republican National Convention in 2016, where Trump was announced as the Republican candidate, one of the speakers was a sheriff from Milwaukee (Wisconsin), David Clarke⁹, whose speech was entitled ‘Make America Safe Again’. He started said speech by stating that “Blue Lives Matter”. The notion of Blue Lives Matter is set against the BLM movement, creating a binary that people can either support the police, or Black people, but not both. This binary also sets up the police and Black people as opposites or enemies when law enforcement should be working for and with the communities that they are protecting. In Clarke’s speech he states that already this month (July 2016) “five law enforcement officers were murdered... for which three more were murdered two days ago”. This statement was made on the 18th of July 2016; from July 1st to July 17th thirteen African-Americans were shot and killed by police (*Washington Post*, 2017). While it is hard to compare loss of life, three of the law enforcement officers that Clarke mentions were killed during a period of civil unrest and protest after the killing of Black man Alton Sterling by police, so they died in a heightened situation rather than during an average work day. Clarke’s speech goes on to mention the general feeling of unease that Americans are experiencing in their communities and adds fuel to the fire of anti-BLM sentiment by calling the movement “anarchy”, stating that the protests in Ferguson, Baltimore and Baton Rouge are a “collapse of social order”. He asserts that Donald Trump is the leader that America needs to get through these tough times, that Trump has always been a vocal supporter of law enforcement and that all people should be treated fairly by the law enforcement.

8 As well as his racist rhetoric, throughout the campaign Trump also declared that the election was going to be rigged in Hillary Clinton’s favour. He created a discourse of distrust around her with his nickname “Crooked Hillary”.

9 Sheriff Clarke is an African American. It is important to note this to show how contentious these issues of police violence against African Americans are and that generalisations should not be made about all African Americans (or other groups). The rhetorical strategy by the RNC, of using a Black police sheriff rather than a white one, is to display Clarke as a ‘good’ Black citizen and the BLM activists as ‘bad’ Black citizens.

2.3 – Conclusion

This chapter has mapped out a selection of the historical moments that brought US race relations to this particular moment: one where the post-racial myth is being disrupted, and racially charged rhetoric is being normalised by the most powerful man in the world, President Donald Trump. Many of the issues and events discussed in this chapter are brought up by the interview participants in chapters five and six. Mapping a selection of historical and social context of race relations and attitudes in the US is useful for understanding the different racial discourses that have been interpellated by my participants. The next chapter lays out the methodological literature and describes the interview and data analysis process.

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.0 – Introduction

This thesis employs a qualitative research methodology, using the ethnographic method of long-form interviewing. While this thesis is interested in American television shows and American society, in particular how race is constructed and lived in this society, I did interview both white Americans and white NZers. The reason for interviewing Americans was to investigate how much the lived experience in America was aligned to that of the post-racial utopia presented in *Shondaland*. The reason for interviewing NZers is two-fold; first, my NZ participants show how much global reach the hegemonic norm presented in *Shondaland* has versus what NZers may see on the news, or in other American television shows. Many NZers' knowledge of US society would be limited to what they see in the media, so while there is a geographic and experiential distance to US society, NZers do receive the same messages. The second reason I have used NZ participants is to see how their ideas and opinions of US society and, specifically, race relations may diverge from those actually living there. In the end, subdividing by nationality did not result in the comparative element I originally thought would occur. For the purposes of this study the participants can be treated as a single small group of non-Black individuals responding to the global distribution of US media culture.

With regard to my research on race I must acknowledge my subject position as a white woman. This position may have influenced my participants into responding to questions of race in ways that may differ from other researchers. I interviewed only white participants because I wanted to experiment with the para-social contact hypothesis, which will be explained in detail in 3.1. It has also been shown in various studies that when non-whites have been interviewed by white interviewers, they tailor their responses in a way as to not offend their white interviewer, more so if the questions are related to race, which some of my questions I posed to participants were (Bernard, 2000). The scope of this thesis did not allow for me to interview a large number of people, so I needed concentrated material from my participants within a short time-frame. Therefore, I decided that the best

way to do that would be to interview people who would feel comfortable and less likely to modify their answers because of whom they were talking to.¹⁰

My study is grounded in the conceptual framework of para-social contact hypothesis and television audiences. The other sections contain a description and justification for my research method (long-form interviews) as well as the project design, recruitment, execution and approach to data analysis.

3.1 – Para-Social Contact

The theoretical assumption that frames my audience research is the para-social contact hypothesis. This hypothesis derives from intergroup contact theory which assumes that when people have personal contact with a social minority that the stereotyping and discrimination of this group is lessened (Bond and Compton, 2015). Other scholars have used this intergroup contact theory and found that heterosexuals who have interpersonal relations with homosexual people had an increase in positive attitudes toward homosexuality and gay rights (Herek, 1986; Herek and Capitanio, 1996; Herek and Glunt, 1993). Para-social contact hypothesis presumes that the same result can be achieved through vicarious intergroup contact when watching television (Bond and Compton, 2015). The episodic nature of television creates closer relationships between viewers and text than the likes of films; essentially, television audiences have more time with their favourite characters to create deeper and more meaningful relationships, as Ellen Seiter and her colleagues found when researching soap opera viewers in Oregon (Seiter et al, 1991). This relationship between viewers and television programming then assumes a closeness that is not as common for films, as television characters are literally inside people's homes.

Bond and Compton's (2015) study of para-social contact was concerned with exposure to gay television characters. It asked if watching television programs with gay characters would lead those who watch them to feel more positively about gay people and gay rights. Bond and Compton's study built upon the work by Edward Schiappa, Peter B. Gregg & Dean E. Hewes work in 2005 and 2006 using para-social contact hypothesis to evaluate the exposure to specific 'gay' television shows and comedians. They too found a

10 Bernard's (2000) handbook also mentions other studies that have found that women generally feel more open when speaking to another woman, but men have no deference whether they are speaking to a man or a woman.

positive relationship between exposure to these gay television characters and personalities and less prejudice toward homosexual people. Both these projects used surveys to collect the data and then used quantitative data analysis to come to their conclusions. In this thesis, I will be using qualitative, ethnographic interviewing to reach my conclusions. This difference makes my study unique. Bond & Compton's study did find a positive relationship between exposure to gay characters and having a positive endorsement of gay equality. While my study is not large enough to make any causal claims like Bond and Compton's or Schiappa, Gregg & Hewes, I will integrate this notion of para-social contact as a way of explaining the differences in my participants' media viewing habits and racial attitudes.

Most white peoples' knowledge and interactions with racial minorities does not come from person-to-person interaction, but through the media; what they see of these different groups are merely representations instead of shared social circles (Gallagher, 2008). Social identity theory asserts that group membership plays an important role in the maintenance of one's self-concept (Weaver, 2011). This means that people feel more comfortable associating with people who they view as similar to them; according to this theory, people will then make judgements and take actions to promote the status of their in-group and devalue others' groups. This was found in Sut Jhally and Justin Lewis's (2003) study of *The Cosby Show* audience. Jhally and Lewis found that Black respondents believed the representations of the Cosby family in the sitcom were positive, as it showed a respectable, middle class family, with two professionals as the parents; however, some of the respondents also noted that *The Cosby Show*'s re-presentation of the Black family was not a reflection of the lived reality for most Black families. Audience members who were part of the focus groups talked about how it was good to have a representation of Black families that differed from the stereotypically negative version that was usually shown on TV, in dramas where Black people are usually shown "killing people... raping people" (Jhally and Lewis, 2003). Jhally and Lewis state that many of their Black respondents made the claim that they knew families just like the Huxtables, so therefore the television show had some authenticity; Jhally and Lewis, however, argue that in the 1990s Black prosperity was more common on television than in the lives of those watching. This claim made by the participants, that they knew families just like the Huxtables, can be used to show how in-group members try to promote their own group/groups. The Black audience members who claim to know families like the Huxtables are trying to legitimise the television representation by stating that it is fair and true, rather than a utopian fiction.

3.2 – Long Form Interviews as Method

Most of the current research on white peoples' racial attitudes has been based on survey data; which, while useful for finding out general information on peoples' views, is severely limited in examining how people explain, justify, rationalize and articulate their viewpoints (Bonilla-Silva and Baiocchi, 2008). Surveys do not allow for the researcher to probe deeper into people's justifications and rationales for why they may strongly agree with one statement and somewhat disagree with another. The benefit of surveys is that you can get a general sense of a large number of people's attitudes; in-depth interviews, alternatively, allow for a greater depth of understanding of fewer peoples' attitudes, rationales and ideas (depending on the scope of a particular project). This notion of breadth versus depth is often in contention in audience studies. For the scope of this particular thesis, and what the researcher is interested in investigating, choosing depth over breadth, and conducting long-form qualitative interviews is the best methodology. This choice is, again, what gives this study its uniqueness: as stated at the beginning of the paragraph, this is not a common occurrence in studies of race, especially around white peoples' racial attitudes. Other studies look at race and television, such as Jhally and Lewis's use of focus groups, but their focus groups were Black participants talking about a majority Black television show, which is another point where this study differs. Instead I am looking at 'post-racial' television shows and interviewing the white audience of these shows. A study by Ruth Frankenberg (1993) of white women's racial attitudes is one of the few studies that uses in-depth interviews to unpack white peoples' racial views.

In Frankenberg's *White Women, Race Matters* she interviews thirty white women in America about their racialized experience of being white, as well as their attitudes toward other races. Frankenberg justifies her small sample size in that she is not looking for a random, representative sample in a bid to make a generalizable claim about white women in the US, but instead that she is focussing her attention on a smaller group of women so that Frankenberg can "map out and situate in sociocultural terms some patterns in the material contexts in which whiteness is lived" (1993, p. 20). Through Frankenberg gathering a lot of data (in the form of anecdotes and interview responses) from these thirty women, she can gain a deeper and more nuanced understanding of each woman's experiences. Frankenberg does hope to find a pattern among her participants in how they view race or whiteness; however, she is more concerned with unpacking and being able to

explain *how* these views or attitudes are formed rather than simply *what* the views or attitudes about race are.

This method of using interviews means that the researcher can employ thick description in their analysis. Thick description aims to draw larger conclusions from small, but in-depth sample sizes; to support broad assertions about the role of culture in the construction of people's world-views (Geertz, 1973). Thick description is the basis of most ethnography, or studies of different cultures. The usefulness of thick description over thin description, which is the level of detail one would get from using surveys for data collection, is that researchers are able to reach an interpretative level, rather than a surface level, of cultural analysis. This study uses thick description and interview techniques to best reach a deeper, interpretative analysis of how para-social relationships with television characters can impact a viewer's attitude about different groups of people.

Similarly, to Frankenberg, this study seeks to use a small sample size to "map out and situate in sociocultural terms some patterns in the material context" (1993, p.20), but instead of unpacking whiteness this thesis is investigating how white viewers of post-racial television may create para-social relationships with non-white characters. This may then encourage them to form particular attitudes about Black people and the current resurgence of Black activism in the US post-Obama era. This study does have a small sample size, but it will map out some patterns between those participants who do watch post-racial television and those who do not, as well as other aspects of the participant's life experiences.

All researchers using an interview method to gather data find that there is some form of power imbalance between the researcher and the participant. Generally speaking, the researcher sets the agenda and does most of the question-asking in an interview, but the researcher is also the one who analyses and frames the responses from participants in the eventual write-up (Frankenberg, 1993; Bernard, 2000). The other power imbalance that I encountered was when asking questions that were directly about race and race relations. One of my final interview questions directly asked about the participant's views on race relations; I prefaced this question in almost every instance, by saying jokingly to the participant that this was the 'big question'. This allowed the participant to know that they were about to be asked a serious question. By me making a small joke about it before asking, they could feel comfortable answering it honestly, and not feel like they were going to be told off or looked down on for their answer. Again, I refer to Frankenberg, who

in her interviews positioned herself as involved in the questions rather than objectively neutral. Frankenberg argues that this method of interviewing served two functions: it allowed for discussion to occur about race in a social context that seems more natural than a direct interviewer/interviewee relationship, and it democratised the research process, which reduced the extent to which she was positioned as an “invisible presence” (p. 31). I agree with the notion of having a discussion about race in a more normal social context, rather than a direct question-answer style. That said, in my interviews I tried to not let my personal views on race (or other social issues that participants brought up) interfere with how the participants answered. Instead, I acted interested and encouraging of almost everything participants said; I did try to question some of their views to get them to be more reflexive and dig deeper into their own views, but did so in a way that was conversational, rather than interrogative.

3.3 – Research Questions

The aim of this project is to find out if there is a correlation between viewers of television shows produced by Shonda Rhimes - which have been praised for their positive representations of African-American characters and, as such, have been called ‘post-racial’ television – and a greater likelihood of endorsing/supporting minority groups such as BLM. The research questions that will be answered in this thesis are:

1. Do non-stereotypical portrayals of African Americans prime white audience members to take a favourable view of race relations in general?
2. How do viewers of Shondaland television shows interpellate the stories told in Shondaland into their interactions with people in their social world?
3. Is there a correlation between watching Shondaland and having stronger endorsement for groups like BLM or other ‘minority’ issues?

I interviewed people who do watch the three shows in question – *Grey’s Anatomy*, *Scandal* and *How to Get Away with Murder* – and those who have never watched these three shows as a ‘control’ set.

3.4 – Interview Schedule, Design and Process

This study was granted ethics approval by the Department of Media, Film and Communication Studies at the University of Otago. Once ethics approval was granted, recruitment began and is explained in detail in section 3.5. All participants gave informed consent, they first read the information sheet (Appendix A) and once the participant was satisfied with the conditions in the information sheet, they then signed the consent form (Appendix B). Participants were given the right to refuse to answer any question or to stop and withdraw from the interview at any time. All participants were aware that raw data may be stored for up to five years for use by the researcher and may be reused with permission for further research.

The interview schedule slightly differed for those who had watched the three Shondaland shows and those who made up the ‘control’ set. Prior to conducting the interviews, potential participants were asked to fill out a demographics form to find out their eligibility for the study. From there I knew which interview schedule to use for each participant. The Shondaland schedule (Appendix C) started with questions specifically about the three television shows and the characters in those shows, before asking about other television shows. The ‘control’ schedule (Appendix D) missed the initial questions about Shondaland television shows and started instead with general questions about the participants’ favourite television shows and characters. After inquiring about television viewing habits, questions in both schedules were the same. The questions moved on to ask about viewing news media, and social or political issues of importance to each participant. A sample of questions from this section are as follows;

- 1) Do you often interact with people that come from a different background to yourself?
- 2) Do you keep up with current events?
- 3) What social or political issues do you feel strongly about?
- 4) Are there any social or political issues that you feel are overplayed or underplayed?

The final few questions relate specifically to race relations in the US and NZ, as well as questions specific to the BLM movement. The participants were primed before being asked these questions, by being warned that these were the ‘harder’ questions. This warning was stated in a way that did not raise the participants’ defences; rather, it

functioned to let the participants know that the interviewer knew that these questions were potentially uncomfortable to answer and to be open to answering them honestly. Rapport was well established by this stage in the interview, so all the participants gave seemingly honest and frank answers to these harder questions.

3.5 – Recruitment

I recruited participants through multiple means. I first put up posters in several buildings at my university. These posters stated the project title, the required participants along with my contact details, and the compensation participants would receive for their time. All recruitment material stated that I was looking for NZ or American men and women over the age of 18 who either watched all three of the television shows or those who had never seen any of the above. I made the decision to not advertise that I was only looking for white participants, as I wanted to avoid any potential backlash that could have occurred if people felt offended by my research without looking further into what I was hoping to investigate. I also did not want to make race the forethought in the participant's mind once the interview started, to avoid them potentially feeling like they may be judged for their opinions on race, among other things. I decided that by keeping my recruitment posters general and as neutral as possible, I would hopefully locate participants without an explicit expectation that they would be asked to talk about race, so that their response would be as true to their experience as possible.

After only receiving two emails of interest and gaining one participant (NZer), I then used snowballing techniques to gain the rest of the participants.

3.6 – Interview Technique

The interview technique used for this project was semi-structured long-form interviews in person and over Skype. Semi-structured long-form interviews are an ethnographic research method (Fontana and Frey, 2005). Unstructured interviewing is when the interviewer does not have a prescribed set of questions to ask the participant, but a general direction that they want the conversation to go towards. Semi-structured interviews have a similar notion of openness, and flexibility in the questions asked of participants, but do have a prescribed set of questions. However, these are a starting point to leap off if other topics or conversations come about that the interviewer may wish to

explore with their participant. The benefit of semi-structured over structured interviewing, is that there is more flexibility; this can result in a more natural conversational feeling for interviewer and participant, which can make the participant more comfortable and likely to answer questions in more detail and with a degree of openness and honesty (Bernard, 2000).

Even in semi-structured interviewing, it is best to have an order that you ask questions in, which start with ‘soft-ball’ questions and end with more controversial questions. This is to give the interviewer time to build a rapport with the participant, making them more willing to answer harder or more personal questions about themselves, or society at large. I did this by starting off the interviews by talking about television, the shows they watched and characters they liked or disliked and why. From there, the questions led on to interaction with news media and then onto social issues that the participants felt strongly about. The final set of questions were related to race relations and the BLM movement. This last set of questions could make my white participants feel uncomfortable, so it is important to build up the rapport at the beginning by asking such soft-ball questions, ones that may even be part of a conversation that the participant would have with friends, family or housemates (Bernard, 2000).¹¹

By using these techniques, I managed to collect a large amount of data from my participants, which I then analysed.

3.7 – Data Analysis

The initial step in analysing my data was to first transcribe each interview verbatim myself, in order to be fully immersed in the data. Even though I conducted the interviews

¹¹ One of the techniques for getting a participant to talk when they are not willing or comfortable is probing. Probing is the practice of stimulating the participant to produce more information without the interviewer interjecting too much. There are different types of probing, in my interviews, I used the silent probe, the echo probe, uh-huh probe and the tell-me-more probe. The silent probe requires the interviewer to stay silent in such a way as to allow the participant time to think through the question and gather their thoughts before they answer. The silence can feel uncomfortable and can put pressure on the participant to talk to get rid of the silence. In line with the silent probe, I used the uh-huh probe which is when the interviewer makes positive noises and nods along when the participant is talking to encourage them to talk more. The echo and tell-me-more probe are ones in which the interviewer either repeats the last thing that the participant says and asks for more details, or just asks them to explain further their last point. All of these probes help to get more information out of the participant, and the last two help to clarify points participants may have made. (Bernard, 2000).

myself, listening to them helped me in the coding and analysis process because I had had more contact with the data itself.

The process of coding for themes in my transcripts had two purposes, firstly to organise the 87 pages of transcription into useable quotes and, secondly, to find common ideas, opinions and statements among the participants to base my analysis on. To begin coding, I went through every transcript with different coloured highlighters and highlighted statements the participants made that related to each of the three main themes the interview asked about. One colour represented statements about television consumption and representation, another colour highlighted social issues and news consumption, and the third colour highlighted quotes relating to racial issues and BLM. While highlighting each transcript I wrote the key ideas down in a notebook. Once I had completed all of the transcripts, I had lists of common themes and opinions on each area. From this highlighting and note-taking stage, I then created a code book, which listed a theme or code and then placed relevant quotes next to it. This helped greatly in clarifying visually the themes that were most important and had the most data to analyse versus ones that were outliers.

When it came time to write up my results and discussion in chapters 4-6, I would refer back to my codebook to find the main themes and ideas to discuss and to take the quotes from. Quotes from all the participants referring to each theme or idea were grouped together, making it easier to choose which quotes to use to most clearly represent the participants' ideas and opinions. The scope of this thesis meant I could not use every participant's statements on each issue, so I had to choose which ones best represented each opinion or theme.

The data within chapters four, five and six are analysed primarily through discourse analysis. Discourse analysis allows for unpacking the exact words that the participants said, but also requires reference to the context that the participant is speaking from, and the experiences and knowledge that they have. To conduct a discourse analysis of each participant's data I had to first discuss what they view on television, as contextually that is very important. This is the data explored in chapter four. Secondly, I needed to explore how much each participant watched, or read, the news and also what social issues they either felt strongly about or felt were overplayed. This data is discussed in chapter five. The purpose of this chapter is two-fold: methodologically, I needed to ask the participants these questions to build rapport and to lead them toward serious societal issues before

talking about race; the other purpose for this data was to provide context on how the participants relate to other people and issues of importance. This contextual information is then referred back to in chapter six, where the participants' views on race and BLM is explored and analysed. Discourse analysis is not merely about analysing the words written or said aloud, but also exploring the entire discursive space that the views were constructed in; scaffolding my chapters in this way allows me to unpack this space in order to contextualise my participants' comments (Talja, 1999).

Chapter Four: Mapping Television Consumption

4.0 – Introduction

This chapter will unpack the first part of the interview data that was collected, mapping out the participants' television consumption. To investigate the notion of para-social contact hypothesis with Black characters and more positive attitudes toward Black people, it is important to first understand what the participants are watching on television. The first section of this chapter, 4.1, briefly describes the participants. Section 4.2 discusses the participants who were part of the Shondaland interview group, exploring each participant's views about the Shondaland shows that they watch. The third section, 4.3, maps out the other diversely cast television shows that all the participants watch, as Shondaland television shows are not the only diversely cast television shows on air. Section 4.4 explores how the participants watch whiteness on screen, and the 'normalcy' of this experience. Section 4.5 discusses which participants identify with non-white television characters. This was a useful way of exploring how the participants see themselves, and what aspects of their self were most important to each participant.

4.1 – Introducing the Participants

Jessica – Age: 21. Studies Law and Classics. Lived in NZ for 12 years, originally from Seattle, US, identifies as NZer and comes from Queenstown. Watches all three Shondaland shows.

Ashley – Age: 20. Studying Psychology and Zoology. NZer, from Nelson, part of the control group as has never watched the three Shondaland shows but knows of them and others who watch them.

Michael – Age: 23. Studying an Honours degree in Microbiology. NZer, from West Auckland, part of the control group, has never watched the three Shondaland shows, but has heard of them.

Emily – Age: 21. Studying Commerce and Law. American/NZer, moved to Colorado from Auckland when she was 5 and only moved back a year ago with her parents. Identified as American. Has watched all three Shondaland shows, but less of *Scandal*.

Chris – Age: 24. Occupation is Medical Assistant, and studied Human Physiology at university, is going on to Graduate School to become a Physician Assistant.

American, originally from upstate New York, now lives in Boston, has watched *Grey's Anatomy* and *How to Get Away with Murder*. Roommates with Matt.

Samantha – Age: 25. Masters student in Climate Science and Policy. American from Colorado, in control group, has only watched half an episode of *Scandal* but did not pique her interest, and has not seen any of the other two shows.

Matt – Age: 24. Occupation is an Engineer and studied Engineering at university. American, originally from New Hampshire, but now lives in Boston, with Chris. Does not watch any Shondaland shows but is aware of them.

4.2 – Shondaland as Entry Point to Diverse Television Viewing

In selecting participants for my interviews, I chose to use the Shondaland television shows as my entry point to find participants who watch diversely cast television shows. Anchoring my participant selection by those who watch at least two of the three Shondaland shows and those who have never seen any of these three shows, it made it simpler to find participants who fit into each category.

The three participants who watched Shondaland explained why they thought the shows were so popular;¹²

As pretentious as it seems one of those like close to Shakespearean stuff, that we have around... Shonda's characters, you see them grow through that and you see them grow through mistakes and I think that's really relatable and the drama is really interesting, really good acting –
JESSICA

They're popular because they're real. They choose settings that are not space... These shows in particular are popular because I think they have a strong representational background – CHRIS

¹² All participants' quotes have been edited for intelligibility and clarity.

All the shows I guess it's cool really smart successful people, so it makes you wanna be them in a way, when I watched *Greys* I was like I'm gonna be a doctor (and I'm not gonna be a doctor). When I watched *How to Get Away with Murder* I'm like I'm gonna be a lawyer, and now I'm like I'm not gonna be a lawyer it's just, you just wanna be like them in a way –
EMILY

These participants see these shows as relatable and aspirational. Each of these shows has a relatively high modality, as they are set in real cities, in real jobs, in the present time. The modality of a text is important in creating its discursive landscape; modalities reflect the confidence that the speaker or auteur has in their claim to truth (Halliday, 1970). In evaluating the modalities within a media text, the structure of things like language use, genre, and situations are examined, rather than just the linguistics. These kinds of modalities are more subjective than simple linguistic modalities and depend on the audience's interpretation (Sulkanen and Torronen, 1997). This higher modality gives these shows a claim to truth that makes them seem more realistic and relatable to the audience – and the audience also claims they are realistic and relatable to their real lives. Higher modality television shows can come across as seeming like a public service announcement when they try to tackle serious issues – because they seem so real, the serious message that is encoded can come across as a lecture when decoded by the audience – whereas the writing by Rhimes does not do this:

I think Shonda [Rhimes] has this really amazing skill of making it underneath the surface, where you realise it in time, when the person is ready. She lets it unfold in a way that different people... realise things at different times... You know that's a sign of great writing because it needs to be individualised and that's why people love it. I think other shows try to attack it head on, like this week's episode is about police harassment... suddenly the whole show changes so that we have a very emotionally telling conversation between father and son and that's just boring, because you know you're watching a TV show and it feels like a public service announcement and it's kind of frustrating – JESSICA

Even though these shows do have a reasonably high modality, the quality of the writing means that the audience does not feel preached to when the shows do decide to tackle more serious or divisive topics.¹³

One of the other questions I asked was in relation to the colour-blind casting of *Grey's Anatomy* by Rhimes in 2005. I asked all my participants their thoughts about this as a method of casting a television show and received generally positive responses. Chris gave an enthusiastic response,

Love it! A +, A+++ I think having diversity in TV is super important –
CHRIS

He went on to explain,

Humans are all different we're all different colours, we're all different genders we're different. We're the same species under the name of being human but we're different in the way that we go about life, and the way that we've grown up and our environments and who we are and what race and ethnicity defines us and coming into a colour-blind audition, is super important for these actors... representation of different ethnicities and races in television is great, because it's empowering to individuals that come from similar backgrounds, rather than just the whitewashed cast, that is just so bland that nobody wants to see. Yes, keep it interesting, that's the way to go. Especially for that time, that interests me that in that time period [2005] too they were so progressive. A+ Shonda Rhimes -
CHRIS

Chris, as a fan of Shonda Rhimes' shows, was incredibly animated in discussing colour-blind casting, more so than any of the other participants. He expressed the importance of diversity in television and film, citing the critiques of the Academy Awards not nominating many Black actors and directors in recent years; he also mentions the lack of representation for Asian actors as well. Chris's roommate, Matt, was also positive about colour-blind casting, relating it back to one of his own favourite shows, *Master of None*,

¹³ However, it is important to note that this is only the opinion of three viewers of these television shows, so potentially other viewers may still view the shows as preachy or like a PSA when they do tackle serious issues.

I think that's awesome. It's exactly how we should be doing things... it just reminds me of Aziz Ansari's show, *Master of None*, he does a great episode where he speaks about how Indian people are always type cast as the cab driver or the 7/11 guy and that's it. You know what I mean? I hate that... It just shouldn't be a prerequisite to getting a role. If you are right for the role, you're right for the role so I think that's awesome. – MATT

By connecting the actual casting process of *Grey's Anatomy* to an episode of a show that unpacks the casting of certain races into particular roles, Matt connects the negative portrayal of racial casting in *Master of None* to the question of colour-blind casting. In turn, he fully supports this as a positive way of casting and expanding the diversity of television shows.

Other participants felt positive about colour-blind casting but did not think it should always be the rule,

I think that's cool. I guess you can kind of see that in all three of her shows. That's good... I don't think it should be a rule, cause I don't think it should be like you have to write this in this way cause that's just kinda stopping the creative process. You should be able to write what you wanna write but yeah that's cool that she did that and I didn't know that she did that. – EMILY

Sounds pretty good yeah. It shouldn't be what you really look like, unless it's supposed to be this dashing young man, and you get some sort of old wrinkly bastard turning up... It's a good idea. It's an easy way to take any bias out of it. And probably a good way to make sure that you get the best people for the role, if you take out your own sort of racial biases – MICHAEL

It's cool, it's definitely cool. Especially given how successful the show is... it's interesting cause half the time you hear about people writing for a role with someone in mind... Yeah it is quite cool, I don't know I feel you wouldn't expect it to be good, well you wouldn't not expect it to... a show is... storyline but it's also the characters, cause you get really attached to them. – ASHLEY

Emily, Michael and Ashley all appreciate the method of colour-blind casting but did not seem to wholly support it. This could be because they do not see diversity on television as a major issue or they think that colour-blind casting is just taking (what they may see as) a small issue too far. Ashley's response is the most interesting, while she states that colour-blind casting is "cool" she also comments that "you wouldn't expect it to be good". She then self-corrects, but the fact that she said that in the first place shows she interprets Black or non-white cast shows as not being as good, or as popular, as white or 'normal' television shows. She either has little experience with viewing non-white television, or just has not enjoyed the ones she has watched as much as white or normal television shows.

The comment also is layered in racial discourse. Ashley has a lower expectation of Black-led or diversely cast television shows. This lowered expectation of Black people (and other non-white minorities) has previously been studied in looking at teachers/educators who have a lowered expectation of Black (and other non-white minority) students, which then affects these students' academic achievement and level of attainment (Solorzano, 1998). This lowered expectation of Black people comes through discursively in different ways. During his first Presidential candidacy, President Obama, was also victim to this discourse, whereby his candidacy was described as "an exercise in affirmative action" (Obama, 2008). For Ashley, even though she does not use the specific words, she is putting forward this affirmative action discourse, that making a point of hiring Black actors is, in Obama's words an "exercise in affirmative action" and is conducted in the name of equality, so it therefore is not necessarily the best person for each role. This affirmative action discourse and connected lowered expectation of Black-led or diversely cast television shows, may limit Ashley's world-view and experience of lives that are different from her own.

4.3 – Non-Shondaland Diverse Television Viewing

Those who did not watch Shondaland television shows did talk about watching other diverse television shows. Some of the participants' ideas of 'diverse' was problematic. Michael stated;

I guess the cast of *Scrubs* is oh it's like somewhat {sounds unsure}
diverse? Yeah, it's still obviously 50% white and but other than that,
none that I can really think of – MICHAEL

The cast of *Scrubs* has three regular non-white characters: Turk, Carla and Laverne. The rest of the regular cast is white, which is more than 50% of the cast. The other television shows that Michael watches are sitcoms or cartoon sitcoms, all of which mainly consist of white characters. By only viewing these white television shows, when he watches a show like *Scrubs* in which non-white characters do have a major role, Michael can consider it diverse, because it is relative to the other television he watches. People can only make connections and claims based on the knowledge that they have. If a person has a limited range of reference, then the meanings that they can receive from texts is also limited; semiotically, signs (which make up all texts) only ‘work’ within certain cultural contexts. By not having cultural knowledge the meanings that a viewer can receive or construct from a text are limited or lessened. Michael does not have the cultural knowledge and experience of viewing other diverse television shows, therefore he considers *Scrubs* to be diverse because compared to other texts that make up his cultural knowledge base, it is diverse.

Another NZ participant also had the instant thought that American television shows were generally mixed, but then thought about it a second longer and stated:

Normally what I watch, American shows are usually quite a mix, but I don’t know. I guess none are really biased, oh well I guess they are all technically biased to white, but I don’t know I guess not. I never thought about it. – ASHLEY

Ashley, as a white NZer, can see herself in a lot of the white characters on the television shows that she watches, so she does not have to think through how to identify with characters who don’t look like her. As she says, she “never thought about it”, because it is not something that she as a white woman, needs to think about all that much. Peggy McIntosh (1989) discusses white privilege as an invisible knapsack that all white people carry around with them but rarely unpack. Macintosh lists 26 different conditions of white privilege that occur in everyday life, which she took for granted. White people do not often look reflexively at the way their skin-colour privileges them, such as: being allowed free movement in different spaces, almost guaranteed representation in film or television, and never questioning whether their race is the reason they had a negative experience. For Ashley, she lives a privileged life because of her white skin; she has not unpacked her invisible knapsack yet to look at the ways in which she is privileged because of her skin colour.

Other participants did watch diverse or mainly non-white cast television shows, among which were *Master of None*, *Orange is the New Black*, *The Wire*, *Atlanta*, *Empire* and *Narcos*. Both the NZ and American participants watched some of these shows:

I really like the show *Master of None* for that... if you were to count everybody it would not be a majority of white people. I love that show –
SAMANTHA

The Wire is actually a really good example. I don't know if you've ever watched it... oh and I watched *Atlanta* recently which is, if you haven't seen it its phenomenal, Childish Gambino or Donald Glover I guess his show, and it's basically a whole Black cast I think there's maybe one white person. But it's generally all Black people. And then of course *The Wire* is very, very diverse – MATT

Matt goes on to explain why he thinks *The Wire* is such a diverse television show:

because the show [*The Wire*] surrounds these characters, especially the Black characters that are drug dealers, but they paint them in a light that actually lets you get to know them as people. They're not painted as in most shows where they're just criminals to the core and they have bad backgrounds so of course they're criminals and that just perpetuates stereotypes but, in *The Wire*, they actually portray them as interesting and developed characters and they actually have motivation that makes sense and you cope with them. – MATT

Matt seems to understand that diversity in television is not simply about having characters of colour on the screen, but that these characters need to be multi-dimensional like the white characters are. Representation should not just be measured by the number of Black characters on screen, but also by the quality and depth of character that those Black characters are given. As television is such an important tool in cultural learning, it is necessary for television shows to re-present a wide range of different life experiences (Hunt, 2015; Kellner, 2003). Re-presenting a wide range of life experiences means a wider range of audience members will feel validated in their own personal life experiences and show other audience members how other people live; this could, in turn, lead them to being more empathetic to life experiences that they are unfamiliar with. When *The Wire*, which is discussed in chapter one (1.2), was created, it made a point of making all the characters authentic and multi-dimensional. This led *The Wire* to being critically acclaimed, but with

low ratings, which the creator attributed to the mostly Black cast (Nilsen & Turner, 2014). As Matt states, the characters have motivation for all their actions, and these motivations are understandable to the audience, rather than them just being criminals, and that being the sole point of their character. Matt makes the point that while the show could perpetuate stereotypes (Black drug dealers and criminals), the characters are much more well developed and empathy-inducing. We are taught, through television, who the good guys are and who the bad guys are (Kellner, 2003); generally speaking, drug dealers and gang members are bad guys, so when a television show like *The Wire* has drug dealing characters but shows the characters' motivations and full back-story they stop being *just* drug dealers, but also husbands, brothers, friends as well. Viewers can relate best to situations that are similar to their own lives. When they see characters, who do something nice for a friend, or sacrifice something important for their family, the viewer can relate to the character, and empathise with them, even if that character is a drug dealer.

Ashley on the other hand does not seem to recognise the difference between seeing characters of colour on screen and having non-stereotypical characters:

Outrageous Fortune, there's a mix of everyone even if they are stereotypical cast or whatever. *Shortland Street* is very diverse, and *Shortland Street* is the cover-girl of NZ television. – ASHLEY

Both *Outrageous Fortune* and *Shortland Street* are NZ television shows that receive funding from NZ On Air, an entity whose mission it is to “invest in authentic NZ stories and songs” (NZ On Air, 2018). While *Outrageous Fortune* centres around a lower class white crime family in West Auckland and their criminal friends and acquaintances the non-white characters are, in Ashley's view, stereotypical. *Shortland Street* is NZ's local daily soap opera, which from its origin wanted to make the show representative of actual NZers of all colours and classes. Ashley does not comment that *Shortland Street* is stereotypical in its portrayal of non-white characters. Perhaps this is because in *Outrageous Fortune* almost all the characters (white and non-white) are members of the working class and criminals, whereas on *Shortland Street* most of the characters (white and non-white) work in a hospital setting as ambulance officers, nurses, doctors, CEO's or other administrative positions. There is a higher status that comes with working in a place such as a hospital, rather than as criminals or in blue-collar or working-class jobs. This may be why Ashley sees *Outrageous Fortune* as stereotypical, but not *Shortland Street*. This is something that can be seen in the Shondaland television shows; the non-white characters

all have good careers e.g. doctors, lawyers, politicians etc. Ashley does not seem to differentiate the value between stereotypical roles for non-white characters and well-rounded, three dimensional non-white characters in the same way that Matt does. This could be explained by the difference in their cultural contexts, e.g. in the US race and racial representation has become more prominent in the news and media in recent years, whereas in NZ the subject receives less coverage.

4.4 – Watching Whiteness

Media content about race often contributes to citizens' views on different races; the dominant discourse will establish a particular view on a group of people, and then media products, like television, will reinforce this discourse. When discourse has been reinforced by the media, individuals who share this viewpoint feel justified in their opinions and behaviours toward that group (Domke, 2001; Kellner, 2003). Many of the television shows watched by the participants were white-led television shows.¹⁴

*Game of Thrones... Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt... I also like
Handmaid's Tale* recently – JESSICA

I loved me some *Gossip Girl... Criminal Minds ... I like Suits, Suits is a
goody... Wentworth, a bit of Orange is the New Black... Ooh 13
Reasons... I liked Sherlock... Brooklyn Nine Nine... I was really into The
Vampire Diaries... Outrageous Fortune* – ASHLEY

I like comedies... some dramedys like drama and comedy mixes... I like
*Arrested Development... Portlandia... I like Archer and Bob's
Burgers... Parks and Recreations, The Office... Orange is the New Black
and I watched a little bit of House of Cards* – SAMANTHA

*House of Cards... Orange is the New Black... Samurai Jack... Scrubs...
Game of Thrones.* – CHRIS

14 The following quotes have been edited down to only include the names of the white-led television shows talked about by the participants. I define a white-led show as one that has a majority white cast. The non-white shows that have been excluded are *Narcos*, *The Wire*, *Empire* and *Master of None*. It is still clear that the majority of the television shows watched by participants are white-led television shows.

Breaking Bad... Game of Thrones... Scrubs... How I Met Your Mother.

– MATT

Shameless... House of Cards – EMILY

South Park... Scrubs... The InBetweeners, Archer, Bob's Burgers...

Malcolm in the Middle, How I Met Your Mother... some of the ones like

How I Met Your Mother are just kind of relatable aspect to it, just the

kind of somewhat normal... *South Park* is cause of how they can sort of

really get into quite serious issues. While making complete fun of a lot of

different groups, which I quite enjoy – MICHAEL

Of these shows a large proportion are white-led comedies, which either have no Black characters, or only one 'regular' and a couple of recurring Black characters. By mainly watching these kinds of shows, that have a two-dimensional representation of Black men and women, it means that the participants may internalise these representations as truth. Modality again comes into play, considering the discursive persuasiveness of these comedies. Comedies or sitcoms generally have a lower modality than a drama as they can stretch their televisual universes into the ridiculous or play out extreme scenarios for laughs. This means that comedies are viewed as more unrealistic, which can allow them the space to make comments on social justice issues (race, gender, class, sexuality) without alienating their audience, who may be uncomfortable with such topics shown to them in a more serious context (Bogle, 2001). The comedies that Michael watched are not ones that use their specific modality to criticise racial injustices; rather, gender and sexuality are more played out within the shows mentioned. Because the television shows that Michael watches do not draw attention to racial inequalities he, and the other audience members, may not be aware of any. By definition of a post-racial television show, where race and racism does not exist, the comedies that Michael and other participants watch can be considered post-racial. Audiences who mostly watch this kind of television may not be aware of racial injustices and may base their opinion about non-whites on these two-dimensional representations within this post-racial discursive framework.

Another interesting thing to note is the number of off-air television shows that were listed as favourites of the participants – *Scrubs, How I Met Your Mother, Malcolm in the Middle, Breaking Bad, Parks and Recreation, The InBetweeners, The Office, and Arrested Development* – all are currently off air but most of these shows are available to watch on Netflix and other streaming services (legal and illegal). This highlights the popularity of

streaming television rather than watching live; most of the participants almost exclusively streamed the television that they viewed. This change in availability of television shows means that audiences have more choices as to what they can watch. This also means that people can more easily go back and re-watch (or watch for the first-time) television shows that are finished and off air. The choice to watch all these ‘white’ shows when there are other more diverse shows available to watch, or to re-watch shows that they have previously seen (Matt talked about how he’s seen all of *Breaking Bad* twice now), shows that these participants are more interested in watching television that is comfortable and familiar to them. This occurs in shows they have previously seen, or in ones that contain recognisable situations, or recognisable (white) people. By ‘recognisable’, I mean things that are directly able to be related to the participant’s own life experience, as in characters who look or sound like people in their own lives. A good example of this is Ashley, when she spoke about her all-time favourite television show, *Outrageous Fortune*:

[Favourite tv show] Of all time? Probably *Outrageous Fortune*... I like binge-watched it in first year... brought back all the memories... whenever I hear the theme song I’m like (dances in chair) take me back... it is quite relatable. Like it’s NZ... it was funny because of how close to home it was... Like NZ jokes and stereotypes and things –
ASHLEY

Ashley likes to see herself reflected on screen. As a NZer, it is harder to see yourself reflected on screen because local television content is relatively minimal, compared to the majority of US and, to a lesser extent British, television content that screens on NZ television. Though Ashley is not from West Auckland, where the show is set,¹⁵ the references and jokes in the show are nationalising. The cultural knowledge that is needed to decode locally-produced television content can give the viewing audience a sense of belonging when they ‘get’ the references and jokes. For Ashley, she feels nostalgic and happy even when she just hears the theme song, which is by 1970s NZ band *Hello Sailor*, emphasised by her dancing in her chair thinking about the theme song. *Outrageous Fortune*’s soundtrack is full of almost exclusively NZ bands and artists. The overall ‘Kiwi-ness’¹⁶ of the show, makes Ashley happy. She enjoys watching and re-

¹⁵ Ashley is from a town in the South Island of NZ

¹⁶ ‘Kiwi’ is a contested term, it connotes images of white NZ culture. It is often unused by Maori and immigrants because they feel excluded by the term.

watching the show, because it makes her feel like a part of a group, that group being part of an identifiable NZ citizenry.

4.5 – Identification with non-White Characters

Through my interviews I found that those who watched more diverse television shows were more likely to identify with a non-white character or have a favourite character be a non-white one. The favourite characters among those who watched Shondaland television shows were;

I'm a huge fan of Viola Davis... I find Laurel really interesting. I just think she has a lot more character development than anyone else –
JESSICA

I like *How to Get Away with Murder* more probably because Viola Davis is one of my favourite actresses and she portrays the characters probably better than any actor on TV. She's phenomenal... Viola Davis's character, she's just so smart and witty and her representation inside of the entire plot is very vital... such a strong female presence... empowering in its own way. She's top dog... [in] *Grey's Anatomy*... my favourite is definitely Patrick Dempsey's character. I mean he was the protagonist all the way and he's the one who leads the show... his character is very straightforward... he's easy to understand, I find –
CHRIS

Probably Annalise, from *How to Get Away with Murder*... She's just cool, she knows what she wants and she's not real[ly] timid, I don't know she's real[ly] cool. – EMILY

As can be seen above, all the participants mentioned Viola Davis as Annalise Keating in *How to Get Away with Murder* as one of their favourite characters. Viola Davis's star power clearly comes through here with Jessica and Chris naming her by her name rather than the character's name. Chris talks about how Davis's representation as a strong Black woman within the show itself is important and empowering for people to see. When asked if she was also the character he identified with the most he explained;

I'd say no and it's not because she's a woman or anything, that's completely beside the point, it's just that she's super strong and super aggressive, and I don't consider myself an aggressive person in any way... If there was anybody in the show that I identify with it's Wes... Wes's character is very to himself and he's very internalised and I feel like I have a lot of dialogue with myself inside my head as he does. So I definitely relate more to his character. – CHRIS

Chris still identifies with a character that is of a different race to him based on the characteristics and personality of that character.¹⁷ Both Jessica and Emily also identified with non-white characters in these shows as well;

[Laurel] Yeah, that's my tendency to be kind of quiet and observe before I do anything and then kind of come out and wabam – JESSICA

Probably her [Annalise], yeah I guess that was the reason I decided to do law in Dunedin. – EMILY

Both Jessica and Emily identified with their favourite character on the show, which shows their connection to a character who represents them on screen in some way, or, having a character who is someone they want to identify with. For Emily, she says that watching Annalise, who is a lawyer, made her want to study law; this kind of aspirational identification with that character is different from Jessica, who sees Laurel and identifies with the characteristics of that character as ones that she also sees in herself. Jessica did also mention in the interview that she likes it when she hears people speaking in different languages.

Like Laurel is um I think a Latina... I love when she speaks other languages as well that's something I love in other people, it just makes everything better – JESSICA

This fetishisation of other languages is something Jessica mentions later, when she talks about having lots of exchange student friends from Europe and wishing she had more.

¹⁷ Chris later talks about also identifying with the character JD from *Scrubs*, who is known for his internalised monologues in his head where the character plays out different scenarios. Obviously these two characters exist in very different types of shows, Wes in a dark drama and JD in a light hospital comedy, but seeing that Chris identifies with these two characters with similar traits in different situations is intriguing.

While we did not discuss this in as much depth as I would have wished, this ‘love’ of different languages intersects quite curiously with Jessica’s feelings about BLM. Jessica disagreed with how Black people choose to protest and their modes of speaking about issues, but she has a love for hearing people speak other languages, especially white, or lighter skinned people, such as Latinas, like Laurel, or Western Europeans. This will be addressed in more detail later in chapter six when discussing how the participants talked about the ‘Other’ and BLM.

The other participants, who did not watch as much diverse television, only favoured different white characters out of the television shows that they watched,

Van. Cause he was really not up to much and it was good comic value.
And... Pascall, cause she’s such a ditz – ASHLEY

I think I really like Leslie Knope from *Parks and Recreation* because now that I’ve done more policy things and have worked with local government and kind of seeing her struggle and why, that character is even more funny to me now and more relatable I think, she’s played well as a strong female character as well – SAMANTHA

In *Breaking Bad* I really enjoyed Jesse, because Jesse has the most growth as a character. In the beginning he’s like this street rat. He does all this crazy stuff and then by the end he’s grown as a person, and yeah, he’s still getting in trouble and stuff, but he’s grown in his way and I think he’s in a much better mental place, which was really fun to watch – MATT

I’d have to say, with watching *Bob’s Burgers* there’s a character called Louise in it. She’s the youngest daughter and very overly blunt and quite ridiculous. They work in a burger store and she was, the dad told her not to change any of the special burgers, so she obviously changed it and she put a burger called the Child Molester, comes with free candy. Haha so yeah, the pure bluntness of that – MICHAEL

Both Samantha and Matt picked their favourite characters on relatability and character development. They favoured characters that they had empathy with, whose stories they could believe, and enjoyed seeing their growth and struggles. On the other hand, Ashley and Michael both favoured characters for their comedic value rather than any

form of relatability. This difference could be explained by the different reasons that each person chooses to watch television, whether that be as background noise, to relax to and not pay much attention to, or to be heavily involved in a narrative. This difference is not something that this thesis has the space to unpack, as it is not the focus of this research.

Another key difference that can be seen between those who watched the more diverse Shondaland shows and the others is that both Jessica and Chris's favourite characters out of the other shows that they watched were both Black

Lucius from *Empire*... I just really like that storyline where he comes from nothing and then figures things out through a very basic kind of Machiavellian stepping up thing – JESSICA

Poussey's character... like she was always my favourite character in that [*Orange Is The New Black*], and again she was a very down to earth character and I love her portrayal – CHRIS

Jessica and Chris's exposure to Black post-racial characters in Shondaland shows (as well as other life experiences) primed them to be more empathetic and favour Black characters in other shows. This para-social contact with the post-racial Black characters in Shondaland helps viewers like Jessica and Chris to form relationships with these characters, which may in turn be the reason that they also favour Black characters in other television shows. When people create relationships with others, they then begin to think of those other people as part of their in-group. The literature on in-group theory states that we as humans try to maintain our own 'group' (Tajfel, 1978). When Jessica and Chris watch and create relationships with Black characters on television, they will start to think of those characters (and others like them) as part of their group; they are then more likely to empathise with and support people who also look like those characters (Bond & Compton, 2015). This empathy toward Black people and BLM is unpacked in Chapter Six.

4.6 – Learning through Viewing

As discussed in my literature review, television acts as a cultural educator. When we watch television we interpellate the signs and discourses that are re-presented to us through this format. Television is available in a wide range of platforms and, in recent years, available at any time on almost any device. It serves as a social space where the audience has mediated encounters with characters and spaces, both familiar and unfamiliar,

that teach viewers how to identify with heroes and distinguish ourselves from undesirable 'Others' (Hunt, 2005; Kellner, 2003). These participants have demonstrated a love of television shows that they can see themselves in, whether this be explicit such as Ashley and her love of NZ drama *Outrageous Fortune*, or implicitly by watching mainly white television shows or in being able to see themselves in people who do not look like them, such as Chris and Jessica, who identify with characters' personalities rather than their race. The differences in watching mainly white television shows, versus more diverse shows, can be seen in the way that the participants frame current events, e.g. what social issues are important to them. The next chapter addresses whether those who watch television programming with a more racially diverse cast framed racial events and social issues in a more empathetic light than those who did not watch television shows with a racially diverse cast.

Chapter Five: Framing Current Events and Social Issues

5.0 – Introduction

While the previous chapter described and discussed the television shows that the participants watch, and how they identify with different characters, this chapter explores how the participants engage with news media and how they frame social issues. The purpose of this chapter and this section of the interview schedule was two-fold. The first was to know how much they keep up with the news, whether being up to date was important to them, and to understand what social issues were important to them. The second purpose was to prime the participants for talking about the difficult topics of race and BLM. The participants had different levels of engagement with news media, and while they all favoured different news media sites to get their news from, social media – Facebook particularly – was a common thread, with most of the participants using Facebook as a means to keep up with or learn about breaking news. Investigating what social and political issues were important and why for each participant gave me a window into how they see the world. This chapter is structured in the following order: first in section 5.1, the participants talk about how much they watch and read the news, and what news sources they use; section 5.2 explores the social and political issues that are important to each participant, to understand their different worldviews; the third section, 5.3, counters the second, by discussing what issues the participants felt are overplayed in television shows and the news media; in section 5.4 I unpack the way that the participants view being friends with people who are different from themselves, and relate it back to the social issues they care about; section 5.5 concludes the chapter by summarising the data gleaned from the participants and how this helps to understand their subject position and worldviews better. This in turn, helps to understand the comments that they made about race and BLM which is discussed in chapter six.

5.1 – Watching and Reading the News

The people I interviewed all had a different level of interest in watching or reading the news regularly. Some were only ambiently aware of the news like Ashley, Michael and Emily:

I like to know what's going on, but I've never been someone to sit down and read a newspaper. I get the *Stuff* notifications... if a juicy headline pops up I give it a read... I never really watch the news, even at home, mum will put the news on and I'll go to my room – ASHLEY

Somewhat, from what I see popping up on Facebook and what not... I follow the news pages and what not – MICHAEL

Less so now that I'm back in uni. But I do have the *NZ Herald* app and it gives me notifications and the *CNN* app it tells me major breaking news. But other than that, not too much – EMILY

These three get most of their news from social media posts (Facebook) and through notifications on news apps, such as *Stuff*, *NZ Herald*, and *CNN*. From this, they claim to have a general idea about current events, both occurring in NZ and overseas. These three do not regularly watch TV news, nor read newspapers – in this way they are tangentially aware of what is going on in the world currently, but they are not heavily engaged in current events. The ease of getting news from social media is explained by Ashley

I guess Facebook, cause it's on your newsfeed so it's right there and from watching somebody's bloody holiday in Bali to breaking news. So, it's convenient, you're always on Facebook, you're always scrolling, it's always there – ASHLEY

Almost all of the participants used social media, whether it be Facebook or Twitter as a way to keep up to date with current events. They either follow certain news organisations on their social media account, or see things on their feed because friends have liked them,

I follow a couple of news sites on Twitter... *CNN* and *New York Times*...
– MATT

NZ Herald, *Stuff*, by proxy I think *NewsHub* comes up from everyone else liking it. I get it through *LadBible* and other various sites like that –
MICHAEL

Chris does not just use his likes on social media to see what is happening in the world, but he also regularly checks the trending section of Facebook and Twitter, as well as subscribing online to the *New York Times*,

Social media really helps. Having the trending aspect is really interesting, because it's a different aspect of looking at the *New York Times* versus looking at the trending section, because trending is more I think a full representation of population whereas *New York Times* which is more opinion based and sometimes you can really get lost in their opinion as well... I subscribe to the *New York Times* and I do have my social media aspects of learning about the news – CHRIS

Chris notes that it can be problematic to only read one news organisation's opinion on current events. He makes an effort to read widely on the events of the day as a way of making sure he is well informed and that he avoids "fake news",

I really do like the trending on Facebook. I think that's really big nowadays um social media in general and I think they do it very well... but at the same time I still do further research just because fake news is this huge concept now, so I see a topic and if I find interest in it or I find that it's kind of shocking or appalling in a way then I look to the *New York Times* to find the full articles – CHRIS

Only one participant, Jessica, talked about reading an actual newspaper regularly, but said that with the rise of Trump she had changed her engagement with the news and current events,

Yes, I used to read the newspaper a lot and watch the news and things, but Trump has made me run away from that it just made me. I remember I was doing French last year and I would look at French news everyday, a bulletin of what was going on to get the French in, and I realised I was getting quite depressed, what is wrong with me, like I'm not eating anything differently, and then I realised oh I've been listening to news in French and I still understand what is going on and it's not good news and I'm gonna stop doing it. So, I've been avoiding it lately, but in general I'm up on what is going on – JESSICA

Jessica has stopped engaging with the news as much as she used to because she has found that the news is, in her opinion, depressing and filled with negative stories. This is

interesting to find someone who is so affected by the news she was reading. Her newspaper of choice was *The Guardian Weekly*, as it was a compilation of a lot of different newspapers from around the world. Jessica now keeps up with the news through *Buzzfeed* and will check other online news sites when she wants to quickly find out about an event but still prefers to read the newspaper to get a good understanding of an event or situation.

Some of the other news sources that the participants used to keep up with current events included,

Buzzfeed News where they give you bullet points of the news of what they know so far... so online news – JESSICA

I like the political satire shows and the comedy shows because I think that they do a really good job of illuminating things in a different way and kind of cutting through the BS [bull shit] that sometimes the mainstream media still has... I really like *Full Frontal with Samantha B* and *The Daily Show*... I do read a little bit of things on like *CNN* but I think I prefer... *Buzzfeed News* and *Vox* – SAMANTHA

I try to read the major news stories. I also listen to a podcast called *The Daily* by the *New York Times* every single day before I go to work which just in about 20 minutes summarises the main happenings. Usually recently it's been about the White House because it feels like all the news is about the White House, cause that's the reality we live in. What I like about it is that half of the show they spend on other events, world events. The other day they had a French election episode – MATT

Yeah like news apps or like yeah *CNN* and *NZ Herald* and if there's something major I'll Google it and click on news and read that... when I'm home I watch *CNN*, or I don't really watch NZ news as much, but I watch *CNN* when I'm home and *Anderson Cooper 360* and stuff like that Megan Kelly, she's really good – EMILY

The participants all use different means of engaging with news media: podcasts, political satires, political commentators and news apps or websites. One of the things that is similar among all the participants is that they all engaged with what is generally considered liberal-leaning news media (*The New York Times*, *Buzzfeed*, *The Daily Show*, *Vox*, *CNN*, *Anderson Cooper 360*). This liberal-leaning media consumption would suggest

the participants having a more liberal-leaning world-view, but this is not quite as clear cut. The following section lays out the different social issues that were significant to each participant.

5.2 – Social Issues of Significance

All the participants had different social issues that were important to them for different reasons. Issues that were significant to more than one participant were: women's rights, climate change, and gun control. On women's rights, participants said;

Gender politics is pretty big for me... for example the first woman to have three shows like that should just be over by now. I get a bit riled up about that, especially that we shouldn't have to pay tax for tampons, that's a good way to get me yelling... I'm a woman and my mother was a very strong force in my life, I've got a little sister. I think we are all very intelligent, educated and ambitious so it's kind of hard to see anything fighting back those character traits in the modern world. – JESSICA

Women's rights and pro-choice: those are important to me as well. – CHRIS

In America, some of the new people in the political seats want to make abortion illegal which is really bad. I think that's just the worst thing ever it makes me so upset and you know you talk with your friends about it and stuff like um and like if someone says to me, they don't believe in abortion I can't be friends with them, which is really bad cause I should be tolerant and listen to other people but that upsets me so much like I literally cannot be friends with them and I can't talk to or anything like that. – EMILY

It was interesting to see that one of the male participants, Chris, spoke about women's rights as an issue that was significant to him. Chris was the only male participant to mention women's issues as being of particular importance to him, and interestingly he was also the only male participant had that watched the Shondaland television shows.

Chris and Emily both brought up being pro-choice and Jessica talked about removing tax from tampons. These two issues are connected to women's bodies, and reproductive organs in particular, and are usually quite contentious issues. The three of

them share the notion that women should be in control of their own bodies and the right for access to particular medical procedures and cheaper sanitary products (which are a necessary item for the majority of the female population). Women, who are discriminated against within patriarchies, have less power and control over their own bodies, as it is usually men who are in power, which means it is men who make decisions about female bodies that they have no lived experience of. This can be compared to how white people are often those in power making decisions about Black people's lives and rights. Jessica, Chris and Emily are in agreement with the right for women to have power over their bodies, and that there should be some government intervention to make necessary female products cheaper. However, as will be discussed in the next chapter, Jessica and Emily do not quite express the same amount of feeling towards BLM activists, who are also looking to be in control of their bodies and be able to move freely and easily around society.

Another issue that was of importance to more than one participant was climate change. Samantha, Chris and Matt stated,

Climate change... because time is very much of the essence and it could be a catastrophe and that doesn't just affect Americans it affects everyone especially people who mostly don't live in very wealthy countries –
SAMANTHA

Oh god... Climate – CHRIS

It's ridiculous that I even have to say this, but climate change, I'm a believer, because I believe in science I guess you know, I believe in science. I think it does not get fair coverage, especially in the current way. In the Obama administration it was covered pretty well, and you know the Paris Accords it was a great first step but now with this new administration it feels like it's being pushed out the door and groups like EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) and NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration) are having to form rogue Twitters which is just unbelievable to get their viewpoints across, and I think that science is not valued enough in this country – MATT

Both Samantha and Matt thought that climate change does not get enough media attention in the US, which they think is a pity because, a) it is a worldwide issue and b) it is time sensitive issue. Both placed quite a bit of emphasis on it as Samantha did not talk

about any other issue, other than general equality. Matt only mentioned one other issue that was important to him which was LGBT issues. This was because he knows people who are affected by LGBT issues, which I will explain further in section 5.4.

Gun control was the other issue that was significant to more than one person. Emily and Chris both saw gun control in the US as something that needed a serious overhaul;

Guns in America needs to be made completely illegal because so many people die... it's common sense. I've had friends in America who know people who have died in shootings. I don't know if you know about the Columbine high school shooting and that happened in 1999 and I had friends who attended in the 2000s and they said they always had a memorial each year. It just hits so close to home. It's funny cause in America you get paranoid about that sort of stuff but people here you don't think about it, you don't walk home at night thinking better not get shot but in America you're like you don't wanna piss off that person they might have a gun – EMILY

Gun control, especially in schools. The second amendment just bothers me so much the right to bear arms is just so controversial. It was meant for militias not meant for American citizens like great have your hobby but just choose something else. Like you knit a blanket. I, I just don't see the appeal in it, I guess other people see the appeal in it... It just bothers me... there are people who literally have weapons inside of their households, more children die all the time because they have guns in their households because their father has guns and goes out hunting... Let's have more regulation in terms of that. People are dying because of guns inside of our country and its so harsh to see there's another school shooting and that more and more people have access to these firearms, because of different loopholes that are going on. Close these loopholes get rid of this for the public like who cares, cry about it, I don't really care its killing the people. Guns are destructive weapons. There is nothing good that comes from them – CHRIS

Emily and Chris have very strong feelings about gun control, and both relate gun control to school shootings. Emily has a paranoia about being shot while she is in America, she knows people who know people who have been shot, and it's constantly on her mind when she's walking around at night. She mentioned that one of the things she had to get

used to when she moved back to NZ, was how relaxed all her friends are about walking around at night, because there is no fear of being shot. Chris hates all the loopholes and thinks very poorly of those who own and fight for the ability to own guns. He does not see guns as a necessary item to have in a home and thinks that a lot of violence could be reduced if there were fewer guns around.

One participant, Michael, had a different worldview on what kind of issues were important, much of which seemed to stem from his background and current occupation as a biochemistry student at university. The issues that Michael found to be most significant were,

Definitely the anti-vaccine thing, I feel very strongly about that... If I could I'd put them all on an island and chuck some small pox in there with them and see how they go. And in terms of those people it almost brings out eugenics thoughts in me. Which is, I know, very, very out there. It's probably the most extreme view that you've had so far. But when you've got people who say have HIV or kids who have bone cancer that are very susceptible to these treatable, preventable diseases then, they're killing kids. And you see that happening in America at the moment, with Andrew Wakefield¹⁸ and his influence, which is also tied to Trump, another reason not to like him – MICHAEL

Michael was somewhat correct, in that his statement was the most extreme view that I encountered. He admitted that he can sometimes spend quite a bit of time getting into arguments on Facebook with strangers about the anti-vaccination movement. It is clearly something very important to him, because he said he did not use social media much other than for that, and just 'lurking'¹⁹. Michael felt strongly about the negative effects of pseudo-science and organic farming,

The spread of sort of pseudo-science. Just a lot of that bullshit. And organic farming. I'm very, quite against that... A lot of the science says that there is very little benefit to it, yet the amount of more land that you

18 Andrew Wakefield is the former medical researcher who wrote the now discredited research paper that there was a link between the measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) vaccine and autism. Anti-vaccine groups still use his paper as evidence to not vaccinate children.

19 'lurking' is a phrase used to describe the social media practice of simply looking at or viewing social media profiles, timelines or feeds without commenting, liking, retweeting etc.

need to produce the same amount of food is significantly higher, so you've got much higher resources need for food that will cost you more, with no actual added benefit. Which then leads on to like GMO's which could cure the world. And then you have groups like Greenpeace that are vehemently sort of against it, they're also blocking golden rice. Which is this genetically modified rice that can produce vitamin A which was developed for kids in South East Asia where there is I think it's 100,000 who die each year from this deficiency, you can go blind and because it's sort of a genetically modified food, its evil and Greenpeace want to keep it out of there... the science ones [issues] is just clearly the evidence is there, and there's just this utter rejection of it... they've just been made up by these groups and the utter rejection of what is true is what gets me, I guess it comes back to my thoughts on the tv characters that things have to be fair – MICHAEL

Michael was very adamant in his views. He also admitted that he was a very “black and white person”, but he tried to see the grey – he believed this admission also made him a “bit better”, because he could see his own flaws. The other issue that Michael felt strongly about was immigration, which as he admits himself could be to do with the timing of the interview, which was a week after the May 2017 Manchester Bombing in the United Kingdom. The anger and upset he felt about the Manchester bombings came up when he mentioned that was a news story that he read a lot of articles about. On immigration he said,

Yeah well, it's kind of easy to agree with [Trump's Muslim Ban] at times like this, especially after the Manchester bombings and these people have been taken into this country and then they go and blow up and kill a whole bunch of children and whatnot. – MICHAEL

Michael does explain further his feelings on immigration, but that will be unpacked in 6.1 as it relates to how he talks about and sees race relations. Michael was the only one to view Trump's travel ban as a positive policy.

Ashley was the only participant that did not feel very strongly about any issue in particular but was annoyed at the idea of changing the NZ flag during the Flag Referendums in 2015-2016.

I'm a chilled person, I don't really get involved. Oh my god! The flag debate though! I got pretty worked up about that! Like *keep* the flag! I got really worked up about it... I didn't end up voting. But we ended up keeping the flag, so all was well. – ASHLEY

Importantly, Ashley was blasé even about the issue that she was worked up about. She did not understand the need to change the flag, but when it came time to have to cast her vote, she did not bother voting. Ashley also could not come up with any issues that she thought were overplayed or underplayed in the media. Her indifference may come from her privileged subject position, as a white, middle-class, educated woman in a small developed country (NZ). She either has not experienced any discrimination leading her to not feel strongly about any particular issue, or she may not know anyone who has been discriminated against because of who they are, which could also lead to her being apathetic. The other reason could be that she just did not feel comfortable saying anything during the interview. The other participants did have social issues that they thought were overplayed in the media.

5.3 – Overplayed Social Issues

One major issue that was talked about at length by two participants, Jessica and Michael, was the overplaying of LGBT issues in the media and on television shows, but for different reasons. Jessica, feels that LGBT representation is overplayed in television shows in a tokenistic way,

One thing that is a little bit overplayed is representation of the LGBT community. I've just heard from a lot of people that it's everywhere, and it kind of breeds anger rather than just hey they're a normal part of the cast... especially now I've noticed that every new television show they make sure they have one or two, and just then like if enough scenes have gone by they just throw them in and like that's not how real-life works. Like why are you ticking that box, because I can tell you're just ticking that box – JESSICA

Jessica's complaint about LGBT representation has more to do with the content of the LGBT characters in television shows. She identifies the difference between having a LGBT person on screen, and having the character be a realistic and three-dimensional cast member, like all the heteronormative characters. This is the same sentiment that Matt

expresses when he discussed the Black characters in *The Wire* as not just being Black criminals, but being characters with backstories, motivations and full conceptualisations. While Jessica complains about the representation of LGBT characters on every television show, Ashley and Matt praise the representation of LGBT characters,

Shows are really good at doing the whole ‘normalising’ like with *Wentworth* and *Orange Is The New Black*, they’re so similar! They’re the same show except ones more dramatic and they’re in different countries... They both have a trans person and stuff and normalising that and the struggles they go through and making it more relatable for some people I guess – ASHLEY

The Wire actually. Always come back to *The Wire*... one of the main characters on the drug side of things I should say is named Omar and he’s like openly gay and there are multiple like sex scenes and thing like that I think that’s great... *Master of None*, the best friend... she’s a lesbian so yeah. That’s awesome – MATT

Ashley and Matt see having more representation of LGBT characters as positive as it promotes the normalisation of different gender identities and sexual orientations. They both recognise the notion of para-social contact, without naming it as such. They think that by seeing diversity on television in relation to LGBT people, it makes those people more relatable to people who may not have life experience with LGBT people. This follows what Bond and Compton found in their study: when heterosexual viewers are exposed more often to gay characters, they have a higher likelihood of endorsing gay equality (Bond and Compton, 2015).

Michael, alternatively, finds it hard to grapple with the representation of LGBT issues, and more specifically trans issues,

I feel a bit... the bathroom trans kind of social identity things, a little bit overplayed. I’m a straight white male, so I do struggle to understand a lot of where they’re coming from. But I feel like it’s such a minority issue, you’re looking at less than 1% of the population most likely, and its making up quite a large amount of the media coverage and while these people’s views do matter, I don’t know I feel like it’s something that is over represented maybe. I don’t know, I’m not really sure where I stand, obviously these people it’s the way they feel but some of them, are just a

bit I don't know, it's sort of out there. Like its sort of an attention sort of thing, not saying that they don't genuinely feel that. I understand that you can be into girls, boys, both that sort of thing, but I don't understand why there are 50 different gender identities or sexuality and I can't grasp that. I can understand if you wanna sleep with 10 different people or something like that at different times, but I don't see why things like that need different terms – MICHAEL

Michael's repeated use of the phrase "I don't know" shows his discomfort in talking about this issue. In Michael's own words he, as a "straight white male", struggled to understand the struggles that trans people go through. This is not really an excuse, because those in privileged positions should be trying their best to empathise with others' struggles, as usually those in the most privileged position (straight, white, male) have the most power to change things for those who are discriminated against. Michael's lack of life experience either through in person interactions with trans people, or para-socially through different television shows could explain his attitude toward trans people. It is clear through his pausing and repetition of "I don't know" he is aware that his attitude towards trans issues could be seen as problematic by many groups of people.

One of the other issues that some of the participants thought was overplayed was terrorism. It was only US participants who talked about terrorism as overplayed in the media, so potentially this is more a problem in the US specifically.

I think that there's too much emphasis in America on false senses of like danger like terrorist action or immigrant population[s] that are being perceived as dangerous I think that there's too much emphasis on being afraid and putting fear in people... there's control in that. I think if you get enough people scared enough they'll be more willing to follow you. I think there's power in that – SAMANTHA

Maybe the whole terrorism thing? I think that a lot of right wing politicians in America take it to an extreme. And say that it's one of the biggest threats to America, and in reality, it's not, it's people with guns and people within their own country that's the real threat. I think that's really overplayed. And some of the news anchors, I don't know if you know who Tomi Lahren is? She always posts or goes on TV and does these rants and says Islam is the greatest threat to America and they need to get them all out now. I don't know for sure, but I don't think that's

going to make a difference, or a huge difference at least... ISIS obviously is a sensitive topic because there was just this terror attack [Manchester Bombings, UK, May 2017] ... people doing these terror attacks are just inspired by ISIS – EMILY

Both Samantha and Emily judge terrorism to be a smaller issue than is made out in some news media outlets. They both, in slightly different ways, connect the media's use of the fear of terrorism with the immigration of Muslim peoples into the US. Samantha who talks about immigrants in a broad sense, may be referring to President Trump's Muslim Travel Ban that was in the news a lot during the beginning of 2017 and also his campaign promise to build a border wall between the US and Mexico to keep out the illegal Mexican immigrants whom Trump stated are "criminals, rapists and drug smugglers" (2015). Emily, on the other hand, talks about the rhetoric in the right-wing, conservative media where they inherently link terrorism and Islam together and try to scare their viewers into being wary or hating Muslims. Both participants see how fear can be a powerful tool to wield to make citizens act in certain ways. The news discourse has a high claim to truth, which means viewers take for granted the information that they present as being true (Mickler, 1998). They both see this as problematic, as each identified other issues that are more important and affect a greater number of people than terrorism (climate change, women's rights, social equality, gun control).

5.4 – Empathy for Groups/People outside of Participants' Subject Position

It is easier for humans to empathise with people and groups who look like or share characteristics with themselves. This notion comes from social identity theory that asserts that group membership plays a large role in one's self-concept (Tajfel, 1978; Weaver, 2011). People are motivated to uphold a positive self-concept so generally will favour groups that they are part of and discriminate (unconsciously or consciously) against groups or people who do not fit into their groups. These in-groups can be broken up in a myriad of ways based on issues such as race, class, sexuality, religion and gender. This section discusses how the participants talked about people who represented different groups. It also acted as a primer in the interview for the participants to then talk about race specifically.

When asked about whether the participants had diversity among their friends and family, Chris and Matt were really concerned and excited about diversifying their groups of friends. They claim that they made an effort to diversify their range of friends,

Oh, I love that yeah absolutely. I was lucky enough where I went to school at Boston University which we have so many cultures that collide into one. That's where I really became immersed in a little more culture than I was used to in a small suburb of New York (where Chris is from). It's very different, it was a very enriching experience. But I try to surround myself with people that have different opinions to me... I do consider myself someone who likes to surround myself with people from different backgrounds – CHRIS

Yes, I do. I didn't when I was growing up because I'm from New Hampshire and it's just 97% white people but then I decided that I don't want to do that I wanted to move to a city, so I went to BU (Boston University) with Chris and I got heavily involved in the theatre community over there. People from BU come from all sorts of backgrounds and even to this day I just did a community theatre show where we had people from all over the place and all sorts of backgrounds so definitely I would say I try as hard as I can to diversify my friend groups because I think it's important. – MATT

Matt went on to explain why he thinks having a diverse friend group is important,

Well I think if you don't have a diverse friend group then you are going to base your world view on a very narrow spectrum. If you don't get to know people who come from different backgrounds and have different experiences then you're going to base your views on very narrow-minded, you're only going to view things through that lens and if you don't at least open yourself up to and expose yourself to other types of viewpoints and other experiences it's going to be hard for you to have well informed opinions, in my opinion – MATT

Matt and Chris are not specific about the different people and backgrounds of the people that they are speaking of, but Matt does talk about how a lot of his theatre friends are in the LGBT community, hence his earlier praise about better LGBT representation in television shows. Matt and Chris both also favour characters and television shows that

have a diverse range of characters, including race, sexuality and class differences from themselves (as discussed in Chapter Four).

Jessica and Samantha both feel a need to diversify, they understand that it is good to have diversity in their friend groups. They both explained that there was a certain level of effort and engagement required to do so,

I have lots of friends... like different sexual orientations. I've had to learn to be engaged with that world, which I'd never had a problem with... just a lack of education completely... friends in college were trying everything so you have to not be phased when they give you a list of what happened last night... you have to know what you're talking about... it's been a lot of looking things up and trying to educate myself
– JESSICA

I try to it's a little bit tricky, I find that the neighbourhood where I grew up is mostly white people and the school that I went to is very diverse in California but my program and the people I spent the most time with it was 7 Caucasian and one Asian, so it was again mostly white people... I think I find myself usually around more Caucasian people than anybody else. But I try to make an effort to expand that a bit. I feel like I've found out its better to diversify your friend group too – SAMANTHA

The effort that Jessica and Samantha talk about in regard to interacting with people who are different from themselves shows how they are part of the majority. By being white and cis-gendered and heterosexual they make up the majority of people. They acknowledge that they do need to make an effort to engage with people who are not in those subject positions, so they can become more educated and in turn perhaps more empathetic to the struggles that other people go through based on their subjectivity.

Emily and Michael comparatively also acknowledge that it is tricky to find 'diverse' people to be around, but did not make an effort to seek out people who were overly different from themselves,

I grew up in America but typically, I hang out with white people from the North Island, like Auckland or Wellington. We all kind of grew up sort of similarly, we all live in Unicol²⁰ I don't really hang out with people that much different to me and then people that I'm friends with in America are a lot like me. In Dunedin there's not a lot of people that are really different from me and then where I lived in Colorado it was also just like a wealthy white area I guess. But probably like if you're saying different like mentally different from me then I just couldn't be friends with them because I'd just be annoyed, and I guess like different growing up or like racially, I just don't, I just don't really see an opportunity I guess. –

EMILY

Not hugely. Yeah nah... I think, like the main thing is that I don't have the exposure. Like when you're back in first year in a hall²¹ then there's obviously a lot more variety of people there. You do end up mixing and meeting a lot more so, but now fourth year (of university) you sort of end up with your own group of friends – MICHAEL

Both Emily and Michael explain their lack of diverse friends, as a lack of opportunity or lack of exposure to people who are different to themselves. Interestingly Emily complains about her hall having a low level of opportunity to meet and mingle with people who are different from herself, while Michael says that was one of the times where he did meet and mix with people who were different from himself. Michael did not keep up with these people from his hall, however, as he states that he has his own group of friends who are assumingly similar to him in regard to subject position. Emily and Michael uphold the social identity theory, that people are motivated to uphold a positive self-concept for themselves and their in-group. Chris, Matt, Jessica and Samantha, all to different degrees, see it to be a positive characteristic to engage with broad groups of people, not just ones that look like people in their own families or neighbourhoods. This means that they may build their self-concept on different values to Emily and Michael.

20 'Unicol' or University College is a residential college for first year University of Otago students to live in.

21 A 'hall' is a colloquial term for a residential college for first year University of Otago students.

5.5 – Framing of Current Events

This chapter has set up and explored how the participants read and view the news media and what social issues are important to them. The participants had different levels of engagement with news media, and while they all favoured different news media sites to get their news from, social media – Facebook particularly – was a common thread, with most of the participants using Facebook as a means to learn about or keep up with breaking news. Investigating what social and political issues were important and why for each participant gave me a window into how they see the world. Discovering how each participant's worldview is constructed helps to understand how they see themselves relative to others and their place in the world. The social issues that are important to them shows how they see the world, whether that issue be gender equality, gun control or pseudo-science. This helps to see each participant's motivation and see what issues have potentially affected them or people they know and care about. Getting the participants to talk about what issues are overplayed exposed what kinds of issues annoyed them, which can be considered alongside what issues they felt strongly about. Interestingly for this research, no one brought up race specifically as an issue that was important to them, nor was it an issue that they brought up as one that was overplayed, until they were directly asked about race as examined in the following chapter. The 'white' perspective of the participants was evident as they talked about issues of importance to them in a way that generally ignored race and class. The privileged subject position, white, (assumingly) middle class, and educated, that the participants carried was clear in the issues that were of importance to them. This sets up the base of how to interpret their comments on race and BLM, discussed in the following chapter. The purpose of discussing the participants' views on social issues was to prime the participants for talking about the serious issue of race.

Chapter Six: Talking about the Other; Black Lives Matter and Race Relations

6.0 – Introduction

This chapter unpacks and considers the participants' views on race relations and BLM, as well as the way in which the participants talked about race. They were asked three questions about race towards the end of the interview;

1. What do you think about the state of race relations in the US?
2. In comparison, what do you think about the state of race relations in NZ?
3. Could you please comment on the BLM movement? Any thoughts, views you have from what you have seen of the movement.

From these three questions came the four main topics that make up this chapter: first, the way in which the participants talk about race relations; second, their framing of the BLM movement; third, hopelessness about change as to the state of race relations and, finally, the way in which the participants talked about 'proper' ways for the BLM activists to behave. I could not use the participants' answers on how they saw the state of race relations in NZ because the US participants did not have enough knowledge of NZ race relations for a comparison to be equal. The NZ participants had enough knowledge of US race relations and current events, because of the influx of US media content into NZ, that they could make informed comments on US race relations. Unfortunately, the US participants knew little to nothing about NZ race relations, or racial history; this lack of knowledge of NZ meant that it would be difficult to compare the two countries' racial tensions with this data set.

6.1 – “The Community” – How White Participants talk about Race Relations

This section is titled “The Community” because almost all the participants referred to Black Americans (and other minorities) as “the community” or “that community”. By not naming Black Americans when talking directly about them, and using a code-word like ‘community’ instead, it positions them as part of a different ‘community’ to the white participant’s own ‘community’. The participants never name themselves as being part of any particular ‘community’, as whiteness is not named. Whiteness is taken for granted as

normal, which means that it is hardly ever named, especially not by other white people. Naming a person white can be seen as derivative as whiteness is normally assumed (Bonilla-Silva, 2012). The participants were asked directly what they thought about the state of race relations in the US, and they all agreed:

I don't think it's good, she says very eloquently – JESSICA

It sucks – CHRIS

America certainly is a touchy place for race – ASHLEY

I think that there is a lot of tension – SAMANTHA

I think that it's going in the right direction and it has been going in the right direction for a while, but I think there is still a long way to go –
MATT

I don't know. It's like well, I'm from Boulder, Colorado and there are not very many not white people there, it's almost all white people the minority that we had were Mexicans, but they were born in the US or came over when they were like really young – EMILY

Woo. It's never going to be good – MICHAEL

The scope of this thesis does not allow the space to discuss every participant's view(s) on US race relations. In this section I am only unpacking three, Samantha, Chris and Michael; these three exemplify the general consensus of views that the participants shared. Samantha discussed different race relations in the US between the Obama and Trump presidencies,

I think that having a president in charge [Trump] who puts on a mask that says, I love everyone and then simultaneously his actions show something quite different makes it really hard. Despite everything, it wasn't better or perfect under Obama, but I think having a strong leader in the White House who cared about those issues made a difference. I think that there's a lot of work that can be done and a lot of improvement in race relations in America, but I don't know if that can happen in the next four years – SAMANTHA

Samantha talks about race relations as hinging, to an extent, on the leadership of the president of the US. The President, in Samantha eyes, sets the tone of how people interact and relate to each other. Having a Black president who created programs and initiatives to help other minorities²² meant that people may have felt that race issues were being looked after and were not as much of a problem anymore. Trump's presidency has created many different issues for different groups. In regard to race, Trump uses negative racial rhetoric when describing non-white citizens (discussed in section 5.3). He also uses codified language when he talks about Black people, for example using the phrase 'inner-city communities' when talking about Black people (Ye Hee Lee, 2017). Some white people used Obama's presidency rhetorically to justify their racism or used it to deny racism's existence (Goldberg, 2015)²³. The imagined post-racial state of the US under Obama concealed (to an extent) the racial inequalities²⁴ that continued to exist independent of the race of the sitting president.

The last sentence of Samantha's comment, which emphasises that race relations is not going to be a quick fix, is echoed by multiple participants. The doubt in Samantha's mind seems to be connected to the length of Trump's presidency. For her, Trump's racist rhetoric and the use of scare tactics and sensationalising of terror attacks (unpacked in section 5.3) will obstruct any improvement to racial inequalities in the US in the near future. This discourse that change and improvement is going to take a while, especially because of Trump and the surge of nationalism in the US (among other countries), will be unpacked further in section 6.3.

22 President Obama started the DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) program in 2012 to help children who came into the country illegally with their parents get on the road to citizenship. He also started a mentoring initiative in 2014 called 'My Brother's Keeper' to address opportunity gaps for boys and young men of colour.

23 In discussing race relations, Jessica explicitly makes this claim: that voting for Obama made people feel like they could then say whatever they want – this theme is also brought out in the 2017 film *Get Out*, a horror film about racism.

24 The ideology of a post-racial US covered over the racial inequalities until around the middle of Obama's second presidential term. Obama's Black skin made people feel that race relations were in a good place and that there were no longer structural or institutional inequalities, unfortunately this was not the case. This post-racial ideology permeating US society at this time covered over the power imbalance between Black and white Americans: the rise of BLM movement in 2014 and 2015 drew attention back to the structural and institutional racial inequalities that Obama's presidency and post-racial ideology hid (Goldberg, 2015).

Chris talked about race relations in the US as a journey, with Obama being the highpoint, slavery being the birth of racism, and how race relations appear under Trump,

Barack Obama who was a President who was very inclusive and very equal and very fair and being the first African American to sit in the White House. I think about Michelle Obama, who said in a speech, she has to sit down in a house that was built by slaves and she's an African American woman herself, that was such a powerful statement. To get to that point in the US is huge, but in terms of race relations all together we're not at a point that's going to surpass anything from our past... slavery happened, it was bloody, it was horrific, it was inhuman and there's nothing that could prevent us from forgetting that portion of our history. That is where America grew and it's so sad to say... the way that people express themselves to people with opposing opinions, especially nowadays with Trump, is terrible. Look at the rallies altogether and you see people screaming at each other because they have different backgrounds. They're throwing words at each other but then words escalate to fists and violence and just outrage all together and all this hate is built up that just pours itself out at different points, so race relationships are probably right now at an all-time low. – CHRIS

The first statement Chris makes, that Obama was a very inclusive, equal and fair president is obviously an opinion. His choice of words is interesting. Inclusive, equal and fair all are words generally used when people are talking about increasing Civil Rights for minorities and correcting an unequal system that privileges those who are male, white, and heterosexual. In one way Chris is right, Obama was very inclusive with the policies he created in regard to LGBT persons, adding to the hate-crimes legislation of 1969 with the Matthew Sheppard Act²⁵; repealing the 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell'²⁶ policy of the 1990s; ending the ban on transgender individuals serving in the US military; favouring legalisation of same-sex marriage; and lifting the ban on HIV positive individuals immigrating to the US.

25 Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act was signed in 2009. It was conceived after the murders of Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr, and expands the definition of hate crimes to include, crimes motivated by a victim's actual or perceived gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability.

26 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' was a policy created in 1994 which banned the open military service of gay, bisexual and lesbian persons

The context of Chris's comments are taken from when he was directly asked about race relations. It has been argued in several open editorials in *The Atlantic*, *Al Jazeera*, *The Independent* and the *LA Times*, among others, that Obama did not create as many inclusive, or equality-inducing, policies in relation to race as people may have hoped (Darity, 2016; Fuentes Morgan, 2017; Qasim, 2016; Kaleem, Lee & Jarvie, 2017). This in itself is a contentious issue, as it places pressure on Obama, as the first Black president, to fix 200 plus years of historic racial inequality in the space of two presidential terms. Chris sees Obama's presidential terms in a more positive light than Samantha did. He uses Michelle Obama's speech as a linkage and example of how far America has come from the days of slavery. He states that it is sad that slavery is how America was built and "grew" upon, but that US society has gotten better since then, but it is still not at a place where it would erase that horrific period of history. Chris ends his comments on race relations with the connection to Trump. Pent up anger and a resistance to listening to other people's views is what Chris attributes to poor race relations in the US currently.

Samantha and Chris both make the claim that race relations have gotten worse under President Trump. They are both speaking about race relations in the sense of how people relate to each other, not in terms of any structural or legislative means. They talk about negative rhetoric and people fighting and arguing with people who disagree with them on the basis of their individual backgrounds. This is a symptom of post-racial societies, the emphasis on individualised racist events, rather than structural and institutionalised racism (Bonilla-Silva, 1997; Doane, 2014; Esposito, 2009). Samantha and Chris both made the assumption that when I asked about US race relations, I was referring to Black and white race relations, which I was. Michael, on the other hand, interpreted the question differently to both Chris and Samantha and the other participants. Michael talks about America's 'enemies', in particular race relations between Americans and Muslim people.

It's too many people with too many very extreme views. In America, you're very far left or very far right usually and I think the very far right creates a lot of these issues, especially kind of your white sort of Americans and the rhetoric of 'if you're not white you're not with us'... There's that old joke that you have an African American friend so you're not racist... I don't think race relations in America is ever going to be good. They've got too many enemies. They represent the American dream if you move to America you start again but I guess Americans

don't always want people moving there, they just want America all to themselves. With all the conflicts America has gotten into its just they make a few enemies... I would say over time they're getting better. There's probably been a steep decline after 9/11 towards Muslims... I would assume it's been better, I think generally as society we are still progressing, and we become a bit more tolerant of everyone, I feel like it just takes a bit of time and exposure, that sort of it just takes a bit of time

– MICHAEL

Michael's views on US race relations develop as he speaks, from starting by saying that race relations will never be good, to ending his statement by saying that society is still progressing and that it will just take time and exposure. Interestingly, as discussed in the two prior chapters, Michael does not expose himself to racially diverse television, or people. Michael mentions the old post-racial adage, of 'some of my best friends are Black' and does say that it is an old joke. Michael also connects racism with white people who are very far right on the political spectrum. He views racism as an extreme event or situation, not as everyday micro-aggressions that can negatively affect non-white people in numerous ways. In this sense Michael is talking about race-relations within a post-racial framework, where racism is done by the odd extreme person and Black-white race relations are okay in the US, or, at the very least, better than they were. Michael's emphasis on talking about race-relations in relation to Muslim people and America's enemies, of whom I presume he means those in the Middle-Eastern countries who America has invaded and been at war with on and off since the early 2000s, was a particularly interesting take. Michael was especially concerned with the 2017 Manchester Bombings that occurred the week before our interview, which may be part of the reason why he placed more emphasis on Muslim²⁷ versus American relations, rather than Black-white relations.

When asked to explain further his views on race relations in regard to Muslims versus Americans, Michael went on to explain how his views are connected to immigration.

²⁷ Muslim is not a race, but people who follow the religion of Islam. However, the term Muslim is often used synonymously in the media as the name for people of Middle-Eastern or North African descent. I am using the term Muslim in the same context that Michael used the term, though I am aware that people who are Muslim are not all from the same place, nor are they the same racially or otherwise.

[with] immigration, I slightly agree with [Trump]... I do find it quite hard to judge because from a scientific point of view I'm very used to saying this is the fact, it's been tested, it's been proven – but then when you get these other things you can't trust what's real. There is always the fact of when you bring in a lot more different ethnic groups and they begin to form their own, sort of area in say a city or a suburb then from what I've sort of seen throughout the times, especially in England I think they have a lot of problems with that. Especially with Muslim and African communities, you get a lot more crime in some of these areas, not necessarily more than the main populous. These communities stick together to keep their culture but they kind of try to segregate themselves from the country that they've moved to. It may sound really bad, but I think they, I don't want to say integrated into society, cause that's sounding like the old Australian... when they tried to outbreed the Aborigines²⁸, I don't want to be sounding like that, but they need to be interacting and be involved in the culture that they've moved into. And I think if we could have that then we could ease a lot of people's minds, especially the Far Right, which is trying to ban immigration and doesn't want to let Muslims in, and obviously would help the Left a little bit cause they're allowing these people to come in – MICHAEL

Michael bases a lot of his opinions on things that are able to be fact-checked or are scientifically proven. As laid out in Chapter Five, the issues that Michael is interested in are based in scientific thinking – so it follows that he would base his opinions on race relations on statistics and 'facts' as well. His connection to talking about English Muslim and African migrant communities specifically is part of his concern about the 2017 Manchester Bombings. He suggests when different ethnic groups come to a new country or city, they will all cluster together in the same area. He continues to make the connection with these people's race, ethnicity and religion, rather than their economic status, which is the more likely cause of these people living in the same area. Throughout the entire

28 Michael is referring here to the Australian Stolen Generation. The Stolen Generation is the name given to the indigenous children taken from their families between 1910-1970 as part of the Australian government's policy of assimilation. Black was seen as inferior and white was superior, so they took Aboriginal children from their families and placed them in institutions, or they were adopted by white families. They were trying to let indigenous people 'die out' through natural elimination, or at least have the children assimilate into the white community (Australians Together, 2018).

discussion Michael does not indicate the connection between economic status and living in these areas but continues to state that racial or ethnic differences are the reason instead.

Michael groups non-white migrants as one homogenous community, rather than a diverse group of people who will have many different groups within one geographic area. By constructing non-white migrant groups as one homogenous community it makes it easier to classify these migrants as ‘criminal’ or ‘terrorist’ or, just simply, different. It is the difference that Michael is concerned with: his comments about migrant groups segregating themselves from the country that they have moved from and how they should ‘integrate’ into the society that they have moved to is problematic. This view reproduces discourses of white supremacy: as Michael states, that if these ethnically different people would integrate into the [white] society that they have moved to it would ease a lot of [white] people’s fears about these people. This assumes that the white society is the better society to be a part of, while the non-white migrant’s home culture is one that is different and, in this framework, a worse society than the one that they have migrated to. Michael’s preference for assimilation and integration of non-white migrants into [white] society is one of the ways in which discourses of white supremacy filter their way into society without sounding overtly racist. Michael is not the only participant to use language that covertly conveys white supremacy or a discrimination toward non-white people, but the other participants who do so do not do it to quite the same degree.

Two participants, Jessica and Matt, were self-reflexive on the language they were using to describe Black characters:

[describing Miranda Bailey] She’s kind of, oh its terrible to say but she’s kind of the matriarch of the group – JESSICA

There’s one of the gangsters in the show, oh gangsters that makes me sound so awful, but one of the main characters on the drug side of things I should say, is named Omar – MATT

When describing Black characters in some of their favourite television shows both Jessica and Matt know that they are using phrases or descriptions that are connected to Black stereotypes and are aware of these stereotypes. As described in section 1.2, the matriarchal Mammy figure is a common one for ‘less attractive’ Black women to play, while Black men are generally given the role of either clown or crook. As Matt explained in section 4.3 the depth of characterisation is particularly important for Black characters,

because while the character he is describing is a gang member and drug dealer, the audience also understands his motivations and sees all different sides of the character, so he is not just a bad gang member, but also a good grandson who takes his grandmother to church on Sundays. These two participants are conscious of the potential implications of racial rhetoric and try to change their language, or note the stereotypical language, that they use to describe these Black characters.

Jessica spoke in depth about the way that her parents drilled into her from a young age that race is just a construct and not a way in which people should be primarily described:

You would say everything about that person before you said Black, you'd be like oh the one with the curly hair, the one with green eyes, the one with the blue pants on everything. Whereas I don't think people get that kind of training over there [US] very much and its definitely just accepted that when you drop a word about someone... I think it was just more of the construct [race] that at least in our minds, that that should be the last thing you are. I don't think it would be because it was politically correct. I don't think we liked hearing it when other people did it that way. But it seemed to just trivialise people I think, so it was just definitely just the construct of not categorising that way...It's even worse, when you hear 'I have a Black friend' or 'I have a Muslim friend don't worry' it's like why, why is that relevant... I find it frustrating because people don't even have the tools to see themselves, being racist. – JESSICA

Her parents taught her from a young age to not categorise people based on their race. Jessica and her family see it as a form of trivialising people. This choice could be read as both a positive and a negative action. This action can be seen as positive because it is a way of trying to be inclusive and reducing race as a form of discrimination in Jessica and her family's minds. The notion is that if you do not see race then you cannot be racist. Her question of why it is relevant if a white person has a Black or Muslim friend, leads her to say that people who do state that they have a Black or Muslim friend are racist, even though they may not realise it. This comment leads to the idea that anyone who names race (or religion) in describing a friend (or any person) is a racist, because race is a social construct and therefore should not affect how you treat people with a different skin colour to yourself. Jessica, in this statement, ignores the very real implications and lower opportunities in life that Black (and other non-white) people experience in their everyday

lives. This leads to the second way to interpret the discursive choice Jessica and her family make; by not naming race they are trying to erase difference, which then delegitimises the differences in the Black experience. This is the negative affect of post-racial discourse that Jessica describes herself enacting; not acknowledging the differences in life experience for Black and other non-white people. Jessica states she does not want to trivialise people by their race: however, ignoring race completely delegitimises the difference in the Black experience. This discourse works to assimilate all races and experiences into one, with race making no difference to one's opportunities in life. Jessica feels this way about race, but as seen in section 5.2 she still sees gender as an issue that can affect one's opportunities in life and is upset by this fact. As will be seen in the following section, Jessica cannot make a connection between her views on gender politics and racial issues. She does not understand race and gender as intersecting issues; instead, she sees them as separate issues. This affects the way Jessica frames her views on BLM.

6.2 – Framing of Black Lives Matter – Critiques and Support

As explained in section 2.2, the BLM movement was founded as a hashtag on social media in 2013, after the acquittal of George Zimmerman who shot unarmed Black teenager Trayvon Martin. According to the movement's website BLM is, "Rooted in the experiences of Black people in this country who actively resist our dehumanization, #BlackLivesMatter is a call to action and a response to the virulent anti-Black racism that permeates our society". BLM is not only concerned with police shootings but also institutional and structural racism that affects Black people. During the interviews, the participants were asked what they thought about BLM. The responses varied from very positive, to mixed feelings, to being unsupportive of BLM. As per the previous section, the scope of this thesis does not allow the space to discuss every participant's view(s), but they can be read in the appendix E. Again, this section will look closely at three participants responses: Chris who was wholly supportive, Jessica who had mixed opinions and Michael who was seemingly unsupportive of the movement.

Chris (along with Ashley and Samantha) had the most positive things to say about BLM. Chris is totally supportive of Black Americans having a voice and having Black issues be more visible in the media.

I think, it's so important!... They're discriminated against. It is a racially charged subject right now and African Americans need something to rally

for and BLM is such a strong point of view in that aspect. A lot of the times they're very peaceful and they speak a lot of really profound words. It's like haven't we taken enough from this minority group of individuals? It's such a micro-aggression when people say All Lives Matter, like come on like you can't give African Americans something?... It peaked, and it is dying down rapidly right now, which is unfortunate because it's still a present force and there are rallies that occur especially in major cities like Chicago, like New York City... there are signs in Boston that have BLM in windows in huge churches on main streets. The media covered it a lot at the beginning and then it died down very quickly and then All Lives Matter happened, Blue Lives Matter happened and that became a very charged subject and then it died down because that's the media for you... The people who are heading it especially, they feel so strongly, give them a platform or something. They had 15 minutes of fame. These people should not be having 15 minutes of fame they should be fighting all the time and they should be getting the correct amount of coverage for doing so. It should definitely be a hotter topic right now and be portrayed even more in the media. They need to be visible. I mean they are, but they need to be more visible to all of America – CHRIS

Chris is empathetic to the BLM movement. He wants it to receive more media attention because he sees the issues that BLM are trying to tackle as important to American society. While Chris does not experience any discrimination based on his race, he is able to see when it happens to other people and wants it to stop. Chris watches racially diverse television shows and tries to diversify his circle of friends. His awareness of issues that affect people who are different to himself through media consumption and lived experience has led him to have an empathetic view of the BLM movement. This is the most positive framing of BLM that I received from my participants. This could be because Chris watches the Shondaland television shows, and one of his favourite characters is a Black woman, Annalise Keating from *How to Get Away with Murder*. This para-social contact that Chris has with Black characters may be part of the reason that he empathises with the BLM movement.

Jessica had the most interesting and mixed response when asked about the BLM movement. I had built up enough rapport during our interview to questions Jessica's views on BLM, compared to her views on the Women's Movement. I had the longest discussion with Jessica in regard to her thoughts on BLM, so her statements will be broken up and

discussed in parts because her views and justifications for her opinions are important to understand. She began her explanation of her views on BLM positively,

I think it's good, I don't know a lot about it. I just hear what the news says about it and what shows up once in a while. I feel like it's been going on forever, as in how this is still an issue after the 1970s Olympics and the guys put their fists up and I thought that the BLM was from 50 years ago, you know. It should be Black Lives *Still* Matter by the way – JESSICA

Jessica acknowledges the historic struggle Black Americans have faced working toward equal rights with white Americans. Her comment that it should be “Black Lives *Still* Matter” is a curious one because it alludes to the notion that there was a time when white people thought that Black lives did matter. The comment sits itself within a post-racial ideology, that in 1964 when the Civil Rights legislation was passed, Black lives were finally legitimised as lives that were equal to white lives, yet discrimination of individual, institutional and societal levels still continued. By stating that “Black Lives *Still* Matter” Jessica is assuming that when the Civil Rights legislation passed it destroyed racism, at least on an institutional and societal level, reducing it to a small number of individual racists. Jessica went on,

All of it tends to be slightly misguided, and oh BLM, that's not the issue, the issue is the lack of good relationship with authority figures rather than just one group... I don't know, it's a slogan that works, I guess. But I don't know if I understand the movement itself and how effective it can be. – JESSICA

This comment was the basis of Jessica's argument against BLM. That BLM, while well intentioned, ignored the real problem – people's relationships with authority figures. This notion that it is not anything to do with race is problematic. Jessica does admit she does not know a lot about the group, but what she has seen of the movement has led her to this opinion of the movement. Claiming that race is not part of the issue ignores both the statistical and anecdotal evidence on police shootings. Black Americans make up 13.3% of the total population; they account for 31% of all police shooting deaths. White Americans by contrast, make up 63% of the total population and 52% of all police shooting deaths – that means that Black Americans are just over twice as likely to be shot to death by police officers than white Americans (Vox, 2017). To argue that police shootings are about

different community's relationships with authority is to ignore race and the systemic racism that affects Black Americans every day. In section 5.2 I unpacked Jessica's interest in women's rights; I then asked Jessica about how she saw the Women's March compared to BLM protests – as both were groups who were asking for discrimination against their group to end. Jessica went on to say the following.

I don't see the Women's March as that whole idea of feminism where it's man hating. I just saw that as hey there's an issue. I think that was the actual version of All Lives Matter that I would like for race relations. It wasn't anti-men it was *for* women. It had that vibe I thought that it was just for general equality and just acknowledging a problem, not against anything. It felt kind of neutral... I just feel BLM isn't very inclusive it feels kind of exclusive... I would just rather if it was more the whole authority accountable movement or something. Then somebody's mind would immediately go to yeah you have a point, because somebody has killed someone who's a child, not he's a Black child who may have not been killed in any other circumstance. Whereas with the Women's March, I feel like it was better, it was a Women's March and there's a Women's March because people are underpaid. I feel enough people are knowledgeable about current events, even if they avoid them, that if you were to ask somebody down the street why is somebody doing a Women's March, they'd probably say oh well it's really hard to be a woman, and then you have a kid and you have to go back to work in three weeks, that doesn't make sense. They would all give you a different reason. Whereas if you said why is there a BLM, oh somebody got shot, or somebody thinks it isn't fair you know, and that's a good point too but it wouldn't be the same outcome as if you asked why do you think we should hold authorities to accountability then somebody would give you the same answer, because somebody was shot who shouldn't have been, and it's not excluding anyone I just think it's different. – JESSICA

This quote underpins Jessica's privileged position as a middle-class white woman. She saw the Women's March as an inclusive movement, with everyone being welcome: it wasn't "against something, it was *for* something". Jessica calling the Women's March inclusive but BLM exclusive may have something to do with her race and gender. The Women's March would probably feel inclusive to someone who identifies directly with the issues that the march was trying to draw attention to. As a woman, Jessica felt included in the march because it was 'for' her. BLM on the other hand is trying to draw attention to

issues that do not affect Jessica directly, as she is unlikely to ever experience racial discrimination, yet she has experienced discrimination because of her gender. This comment on the inclusivity of one movement and exclusivity of another is particularly telling about how Jessica's sense of self is constructed and which groups she feels kinship with. Stating that the Women's March felt more inclusive displays Jessica's white privilege; many critics argued that the Women's March was for white, cis-gendered women and it was a peaceful march precisely because of its participants' whiteness (Ramanathan, 2017). Jessica felt included in the Women's March precisely because of her white femaleness, whereas BLM (which was founded by three Black women), is mainly represented by the wrongful deaths of young Black men. This is an experience that Jessica feels excluded from, and, therefore, excluded from understanding the movement's motivations.

Jessica also stated that the media representations of both the Women's March and different BLM protests may impact the way that she sees the two groups. She noted that on the news BLM protests were usually represented with "firebombing, or fighting or rioting", whereas the Women's March was "more friendly, and celebrities were there, smiling". The more positive representations of the Women's March made Jessica think that it was more inclusive. The violence that sometimes occurs at BLM protests is often overplayed and sensationalised by the news media, and the actions of a few are presented as the actions of all. Violence is considered uncivil behaviour and generally people do not want to associate with violent acts or violent people. Since the media chooses to present BLM in this manner to delegitimise the movement, it means that white people like Jessica, who could become allies of the movement, feel like they want to distance themselves from a group with an important message because they do not want to be seen supporting violence. Sue Abel, discusses a similar situation in her book, *Shaping the News: Waitangi Day on Television* (1997). Abel discusses how Maori protests at Waitangi Day celebrations are constructed in the news media. She comes to the conclusion that there are two different Maori portrayed in the news media, 'Tame Maori' and 'Wild Maori' (Abel, 1997). The Tame Maori are ones who perform the traditional dances and greetings for foreign dignitaries and Pakeha leaders; the Wild Maori are the ones who protest, they are young and urban, whereas the Tame Maori are older and live on rural maraes. The Wild Maori are the ones who protest and disrupt the celebrations at Waitangi Day; the news media concentrates on the protests themselves without unpacking why these people are protesting. It is about the optics of the protest and disruption, rather than the root causes of

the protests; this leaves viewers with a negative view of the protesters, even though they may have empathised or understood the reason for the protests if they had been included in the news coverage, rather than just the controversial visuals of the young Maori protesters (Abel, 1997). Abel's work connects well with the BLM movement and how they are represented in news coverage. The news media focuses on the young Black men protesting as the 'bad' Black citizens and uses the older Black men who were part of the 1960s Civil Rights movement, like Rev. Jesse Jackson and John Lewis to represent the respectable 'good' Black citizens who protested peacefully.

Michael's response to BLM exemplifies the most negative response toward BLM I received, though it still had some nuance.

I'm not sure of the exact statistics on things but any time that a Black person is shot by the police there is a huge media representation of it, even though it might not necessarily be representative of all shootings by police. I think things like that could potentially be over represented, which negatively reinforces it in my mind and almost makes it not matter so much. Well not that it doesn't matter so much but I kind of think that these people are a bit out there, a bit crazy and I don't quite know how to say what I'm thinking. Obviously shooting anyone is bad, unless it's a situation where it kind of has to be done. I guess in America you do have situations where you do have racist cops that are overly trigger happy which I guess is a thing with America's gun culture... Like that's my views on BLM, All Lives Matter more than anything, it shouldn't necessarily just be a race-based kind of thing – MICHAEL

The last sentence of Michael's comments is most telling, saying All Lives Matter more than anything. A couple of participants also echoed this sentiment (Jessica and Ashley) to varying degrees. As Michael himself states, he is not fully informed on the BLM movement, so whether he is aware of the official All Lives Matter group that was set up in opposition to BLM is uncertain; however, he does say those three words and follows it by stating that it should not be a race-based thing. This sentence attempts to delegitimise the issues and aspects of the Black experience that BLM tries to draw attention to. His reasons for this attitude are along the same lines as his reasoning for not supporting (or being unsure about) other social issues groups – he does not know the statistics on the issue. Michael seems to only be swayed by quantitatively proven fact and statistics. He states that he thinks that police shootings of Black people may be over-represented in the

media, which makes him think about the issue negatively or makes him disinterested because of the incessant media coverage. As stated earlier, Black people make up 31% of deaths by police shooting and white people make up 52% of deaths by police shooting, so in one way Michael may be correct in stating that Black deaths by police are over-represented in the media; but when you combine the population statistics with the death by police shootings statistics and see that Black people are twice as likely to be shot by police then these statistics could contradict the claim that Black deaths by police are over-represented in the media. Statistics can always be manipulated or interpreted into a multitude of different meanings as they are “value-laden and bring with them a specific worldview that prioritizes certain courses of action over others.” (Rutland & Aylett, 2008, p.639).

It is worth noting that Michael feels more negatively about the movement because of the large amount of media attention given to stories about the deaths of Blacks at the hands of police. As he later stated “these people are a bit out there”; this reveals a fair bit about Michael’s worldview. He made a similar statement about trans-activists – it seems that for Michael, people who are part of a minority and draw attention to issues that affect them and the rest of that minority make Michael feel like those groups are just “attention seeking”, because they are a minority and not representative of the white, straight, cis-gendered, male majority or ‘ruling’ group. If an issue is one that only affects a minority, Michael does not see it as being important, or if it does get a lot of media attention, it makes him reject the movement or issue more because (in Michael’s mind) the issue is being overplayed, and sensationalised. Looking back to section 5.2, Michael explained that the issue most important to him was vaccinations and ridding the world of anti-vaxxers. Vaccination is something that most of the population receive, and when large numbers of people aren’t vaccinated it puts more of the population at risk of illness and the diseases that vaccinations try to prevent. Michael feels strongly about it because it is a majority, ‘everyone is affected’ issue, not a minority issue that affects a small proportion of a population.

Michael seems to struggle to reach outside his own subject position and empathise with groups or people who are outside his own subjectivity. The television shows that he watches also re-present his own views back to him. He did not watch any television shows that had a large proportion of non-white characters in the cast. This lack of para-social contact with television characters who look different to Michael may help explain why he does not seem to empathise with people outside of his own white positioning. Michael had

stated that he really only associates with, or is friends with, people who back up his own views; by being stuck in this feedback loop Michael may rarely experience different world-views or people, which means that his views are unlikely to change.

6.3 – Hopelessness about Change

During the interviews with the participants, one of the themes that came up was a sense of hopelessness that race relations would ever change, in the US or even in NZ. Participants talked about nationalism in different contexts as part of this hopelessness, but mainly they talked about how it is simply too difficult to change minds, and that because racism is so ingrained in the social fabric in different ways, it would be almost impossible for change to occur. Samantha and Chris (whose comments were unpacked in 6.1) both spoke of President Trump's term as one that would likely slow down or stop progress toward more equality and equity for Black (among other non-white) citizens. They both felt a kind of hopelessness at the rate of change because of who sat in the White House, but were also both positive about BLM and what they could achieve even with the sometimes-negative media coverage they received. In this section I will unpack a short comment from Chris, and a longer statement from Emily, as they both expressed most clearly a sense of hopelessness about any positive change to race relations. Chris started his answer on the state of race relations with the following comment,

It will always be strained. It will always be strained and there is nothing that can change it, there are things that can ease it a lot better – CHRIS

While Chris's longer comment is unpacked in section 6.1, this small comment is quite telling. While Chris does go on to say that he wants positive change, equality and supports BLM, his initial statement on the state of race relations is one that is tinged with a sense of hopelessness. His emphasis on this strained relationship is connected in his later comments to the history of racism, the Obamas, and Trump. Stating that nothing will change this strained relationship but that things can be eased somewhat is an interesting claim. Chris could be considered a realist, who understands the world through the mind-set that there will always be racists, or people who try to take advantage of the disadvantaged. This could be one way to view his statement. If Chris cannot see a path towards equity and equality, then he cannot see a future where race relations will not be strained. He accepts a world-view that there will always be an uneven playing field, this, in turn, will always cause resentment, inequity and inequality. Racism is common because it is a convenient

tool of aggression; racism is so ingrained in the social fabric that it is an easy position to sit in as the coloniser (Memmi, 2014). Chris does not buy into the notion of post-Obama US as a post-racial utopia and is very clear that racism is a problem and that being white is an advantageous position to be born into. Though Chris has a sense of hopelessness about race relations becoming less strained and more equitable and equal, he does want to support groups and movements that are drawing attention to inequality, so he is empathetic to such movements as BLM.

Emily on the other hand is apathetic about positive change,

There's always gonna be, it sounds so bad, but there's never gonna be a perfect world. When civilisation started people were always discriminated against, and there was always racism and always someone being called out for something. It's hard to know what's important and what's not. For someone to say, okay everyone needs to be equal and everyone needs to think this way it means that everyone needs to be equal minded and that everyone needs to be the same and that's like real communist. I feel it's always going to be an issue, as long as humans are alive, there is always going to be a hierarchy of people – EMILY

Emily is adamant that there is nothing much you can do about racism and the state of race relations because racism is inherent to society; it has always been there, therefore it can never leave. While she and Chris agree somewhat in this sense, that race relations will never be perfect and that it will always be strained, she differs in her apathy to the situation as a whole; for example, her comment that it is hard to know what is important and what is not is important. She later talked about BLM in regard to the news coverage, stating “you don't know who to believe” because there are conflicting stories and reports. When it is too hard to glean what has happened, or is happening, Emily seems to become apathetic. The comment about importance could also relate to whether she views racism as an issue that could be considered important because of the proportion of a population that it affects. Emily stated in her interview that where she lived in Colorado, there were few Black people, so she has no personal connection to the issue of racism in that way. The television shows that she watches, *Grey's Anatomy*, and *How to Get Away with Murder* also present for the most part a post-racial utopia, so race is not an issue for the Black characters, which again means that Emily does not have a relationship to people or representations that make racism and racial inequality a ‘real’ issue. Emily, in this statement, demonstrates her white privilege. If she was not at the top of the hierarchy, being white, she would probably feel

more positively about the notion of people being treated equally. For Emily, her whiteness protects her from racial discrimination, so for her the issue of inequality is something that does not negatively affect her, so she can afford to be blasé about the subject. Emily does not discount that racism and an inequality in opportunities for non-white people is a serious issue, but is almost apathetic to the issue, because in her opinion, “there is always going to be a hierarchy of people”. Her lack of lived or para-social experience with people or representations may encourage this apathy about the issue of race relations.

6.4 – ‘Rules’ for How the Other Should Behave

While interviewing the participants about BLM there were a couple of mentions about rules, for how ‘the Other’ (Black people) should behave, especially in regard to how they protest. Matt’s comments on this were the clearest and also fell right in line with the way in which the news media often critiques the BLM movement’s protest style, suggesting that it does not mimic the 1950s-60s Civil Rights movement, and therefore the BLM is protesting incorrectly. The following comments came from Matt after I asked him what his thoughts were on the BLM movement.

I like to think their views are good, but I don’t think they’re acted out in the right way – MATT

In this first comment Matt does acknowledge that the BLM is coming from an important place and that there are issues that need to be addressed. He then undercuts his first statement in a way that in a way delegitimises the movement, by stating they do not ‘act’ in the right way. Matt makes a claim for how Black people should act in different situations. This kind of commentary is used often in the news media when talking about BLM, with the person making the comment using their whiteness, and therefore ‘civility’, as the authority to claim that the BLM movement is acting incorrectly. Matt elaborated,

I have mixed opinions because I don’t believe in violent protest at all and I wouldn’t say that they’re all violent or that all BLM movements are violent but there are some where they’re damaging property and I don’t think that’s right. I think you can stand up for your rights without damaging other people’s property – MATT

Matt does not believe in violent protest in any situation and that is how he sees some of the BLM protests, as violent. He does state that he does not think that all the

protests are violent but thinks that a lot of them are. In Matt's opinion, there are other ways to stand up for your rights without resorting to violence; he followed this statement with this example,

The whole Civil Rights movement is a great example of that obviously. Martin Luther King believed completely in peaceful protest, even when times are tough, and look where we are. I think it's a much more effective way. I do think BLM is important and I do think that it's good and I think it's an empowering thing for them and I can't take it away from them. It's hard for me to have strong feelings about it because I don't go through that, I've never gone through what it's like to be Black, so I just try to support them and support the movement because it's something that empowers them as a people, but I don't think it's okay to have violent protests. – MATT

Matt jumps to the Civil Rights movement as an example of the 'right' way to protest against racial inequality and inequity; however, he does not explain in what ways peaceful protest was effective. I would assume he means in regard to the passing of Civil Rights legislation in 1964, which was a positive step forward toward equality and equity; however, it was not a fix all. Efficacy of the Civil Rights Movement, or any movement dealing with injustice and discrimination of one group over another, would be hard to quantify so it's a difficult notion to comment on. Matt goes on to say that he thinks that BLM is important, but continually uses language to distance himself from the group, saying things like "it's an empowering thing for them", "I can't take it away from them", "them as a people". By continually calling the Black people involved in BLM 'them' it creates an us/them binary, whereby you can be with 'us' white people or with 'them' the BLM activists. Matt says that BLM is important for 'them', the Black activists, but distances himself because he does not agree with the violence that sometimes occurs at the protests.

Matt concludes his views by implying his whiteness but without naming it, by saying he does not know what it's like to be Black. The purpose of this statement could be to rationalise his views. Matt's comments about the movement and the way he finished with a comment about lack of lived experience, shows that he is still unsure about his views. He does not like the violence, but he wants to support the group, although he is unsure about how to do this when he does not fully support all the actions of the group. Matt does not seem to understand that the issues that the BLM is trying to draw attention to

are issues that affect everyone. He talked only of the violent protests, rather than the systemic injustice, which is what BLM is actually trying to alleviate. Matt does not make the connection between the protests that occur after police shootings, to the reason that the police are more likely to shoot at young Black men. Matt had other comments of how the BLM movement is run,

It seems a little bit disorganised as well, it seems like there are different factions within the Black Lives movement, where some are super aggressive and doing these public things, like light cars on fire and break windows. I think it was in Baltimore where they like broke this store and that's not okay, but I think if they organised a little bit better and culminated their views together – MATT

Again, Matt is criticising the movement for how it appears to be run. He notes again that not everyone is violent, but it seems to him that there is an aggressive faction that tends to get a lot of media attention. Matt calls the group disorganised. The BLM group generally protests unlawful Black deaths by police officers after they happen, so in this way they are more a reactive movement, coming together to react to an event. The nature of reactionary protests leaves less room for the conventional organisation that Matt would like for the group. However, despite the media representing only the protests, BLM's website is very organised, with plenty of information regarding upcoming actions, where to find a chapter of the movement, and contact details. Matt did admit that most of what he saw and knew of the BLM came from the news media and social media, which could skew his view of the movement. Calling the movement unorganised works discursively to delegitimise the work they do. By calling BLM disorganised, it makes it seem that they will never be effective change makers. The delegitimation of the group makes the issues that they are trying to draw attention to seem irrelevant, or unimportant. The lack of a clear leader to the BLM movement may add to this discourse of disorganisation; they do not have one clear spokesperson, instead many men and women speak on behalf of the movement to spread and empower many different Black experiences (rather than just the voice of a singular Black man). The idea of having one spokesperson to advocate for the group is something that BLM is purposefully trying to get away from, but this then leads to an impression that the group is disorganised by the majority because they are not used to this form of advocacy and protest.

When a white person, such as Matt, critiques the organisation of a group that is specifically about advocating for the betterment of Black lives, it is problematic. These

kinds of critique are used in the media to delegitimise the actions and issues that the BLM is drawing attention to, and when other people repeat these critiques it works to reinforce the discourse that the BLM should not be listened to because they are acting out violently. The rhetoric that they would be heard more clearly and be more effective if they just protested peacefully like the Civil Rights movement did, ignores the changing media-scape and 24/7 news cycle. Attention is now the most important currency for news media as it has shifted online; the masses of different news sites all reporting the same events means that attention-grabbing headlines are necessary to garner the most ‘clicks’ (Tufekci, 2013). Peaceful and uneventful BLM protests are not reported on in the same way; they do not garner as much attention as the large protests that sometimes turn violent because of a small minority. This is not to condone the destruction of property and violence against members of the public, but there needs to be more discussion around why some BLM activists turn to violent action. There is little empathy among those who critique the way that the BLM activists act out of desperation and exasperation. The constant discrimination that many Black Americans encounter in their lives is a very specific experience that is hard for others to understand. Critiquing the way in which they choose to express their experience ignores the problems that they are trying to draw attention to. Problematically, white skin can imbue a person with a sense of authority to critique and create rules for how ‘the Other’ should behave.

6.5 – Relating Black Lives Matter to Shondaland

This chapter unpacked the way in which the participants viewed race relations and the BLM movement. By exploring their views on race relations and BLM and connecting it to their media consumption and other issues of importance to them, this chapter has shed light on the relationship between television consumption and views on race relations. It has shown the importance of in-depth Black representation in television shows, rather than just having Black characters to make a quota. None of the participants knew anyone directly related to the BLM movement, so most of their views were based in television, news media and social media consumption. This led to varied views, as the participants varied in their media consumption and how much value they placed on the media they consumed.

The three participants who watched the Shondaland shows, Chris, Jessica and Emily, had different views on BLM but were all generally positive toward the movement. Chris showed the most empathy toward the BLM movement out of all the participants. He

was also the participant who was the most enthusiastic about Shonda Rhimes' colour-blind casting. He loved the notion of representing diverse life experiences and empowering those who are often powerless in different situations. Some of Chris's favourite television characters were also Black, and he identified with a Black character in *How to Get Away with Murder*. His para-social contact with Black television characters may have led to his greater empathy for the BLM movement. However, Jessica and Emily also identified with non-white characters in *How to Get Away with Murder* and watched other racially diverse television shows, but they did not express the same level of empathy for the BLM movement. The post-raciality that the Shondaland shows operate under may be decoded by Jessica and Emily in a way that is not productive toward creating greater empathy for BLM and racial inequalities. They, especially Jessica, seem to have absorbed the post-racial ideology evident in the Shondaland shows; Jessica discounts race as part of the reason behind why young Black men are shot by police, and instead positions the problem as an issue between different communities and their relationship to authority figures, like the police. Emily also is unsure of the validity of the claims made by the BLM movement, as she thinks it is overrepresented in the media. While Jessica and Emily's knowledge of Black people is mainly derived from television or filmic representation, the post-racial Black characters in Shondaland make race a non-issue, which is potentially why Jessica and Emily see race as a non-issue or a lesser issue as well. They both attribute racism to individualised events rather than seeing racism as a structural and systemic issue.

Of the four participants who did not watch the Shondaland television shows, (Matt, Ashley, Michael and Samantha); only Matt and Samantha had watched a show with a high number of in-depth Black characters (*The Wire* and *Orange is The New Black*). Both Matt and Samantha also were the most empathetic out of these four participants about BLM. Matt's thoughts on BLM are unpacked in section 6.4, and while he does have problems with the way that the movement chooses to protest, he has some support and empathy for the problems that the movement is trying to draw attention to. The para-social contact that Matt has with Black characters are through the show *The Wire* where the majority of Black characters are drug dealers/users or gang members. Even though *The Wire* is praised for the three-dimensional characters, who Matt felt empathy toward – these characters are still stereotypical roles for Black actors. This may explain some of Matt's attitude toward BLM, as he sees the overall issues that BLM is trying to draw attention to, but because his para-social contact is with criminal characters, so this may be why he takes issue with the way that BLM protest. Compared to Chris, who watches Shondaland shows, and is fully

supportive of BLM, potentially because of his para-social contact with these post-racial characterisations. Chris and Matt are interesting to compare as they live together and have shared life experiences, so their views on BLM are somewhat arguably different because of their different viewing habits. Samantha was also empathetic to the BLM movement, she acknowledges the higher level of discrimination that many Black people experience, and comments that the movement receives quite a lot of undeserved negative attention. Both Matt and Samantha's para-social contact to Black characters was both through television shows where the Black characters are criminals, but the Black characters have such depth of character that these characters are not *just* criminals, but also members of close families, churches and would do anything for their friends. These positive attributes are shown as motivations for some of these characters' criminal activities; this helps create positive connotations in Matt and Samantha's heads of Black people (even ones who may act uncivilly), which then follows with their empathy with BLM.

Ashley watched mainly white-led television shows (some shows having one or two non-white characters, but these were not lead characters), and as seen in section 5.2 was apathetic to most social issues, even ones she did care about. She did relate BLM to an episode of one of her favourite shows, *Brooklyn Nine Nine*, where a Black character is mistaken for being a criminal because he is walking in a white neighbourhood (his own neighbourhood). This was Ashley's only connection that she could make with BLM. This one episode provided her with a para-social contact example that was specific to racial profiling of Black men by police. Ashley did make some general, positive statements about BLM, but also did not know enough about the movement to talk about her views at length.

Michael, as unpacked in section 6.2, had the most negative response toward BLM out of all the participants. As stated in section 6.2, Michael bases a lot of his opinions on scientific, statistical or otherwise quantitatively measurable facts. Michael thinks that BLM is over-played in the media, which makes him think negatively about the movement. He also expressed support for President Trump's Muslim Ban, as he favoured assimilation and integration of non-whites into [white] society. Michael did not watch any television show that had either a majority non-white cast, or many non-white characters at all. He described *Scrubs* as a television show that had a large number of non-white characters, but this is not an accurate claim; however, it may have a larger number of non-white characters compared to the other television shows Michael watches. The lack of para-social exposure and contact with Black characters may have affected how Michael views the BLM movement. Michael watched the least racially diverse television shows and also had the

most negative attitude toward BLM. While this sample size is small, there is clearly a connection between having para-social contact with Black television characters and having a more positive attitude, or more empathy, for the BLM movement.

Conclusion

This thesis has mapped out the television viewing and racial attitudes of seven individuals from the US and NZ. By using a combination of both critical race theory and discourse analysis, as well as testing the para-social contact hypothesis of white television audiences and their views on the BLM movement, this thesis has created a unique new understanding of the importance of three-dimensional, nuanced Black (and non-white) television characters. I investigated how white participants relate to non-white television characters, suggesting that para-social contact with such character's correlates to having more empathy for racial issues and—specific to this thesis—the BLM movement. Television, as a medium, teaches its viewers who the 'good guys' and 'bad guys' are: unfortunately, commonly the good guys are the white characters, and the bad guys are the Black characters (Bogle, 2001; Kellner, 2003). This means that for those viewers who never meet a Black person their only knowledge of Black people (whom are obviously not all the same) is through television or other media products. When viewers only see negative portrayals of Black characters, these portrayals are internalised and become ideological (Hall, 1996). This thesis calls for there to be more portrayals of Black characters in the media and, specifically, in television. My research has shown that there is a correlation between [white] viewers seeing these non-stereotypical representations (in the form of post-racial television characters) and having a greater empathy for racial issues that do not necessarily affect them because of their privileged white subject position.

This thesis was directed by the following research questions, which aided in the construction of the interview schedule and how the participants' interview data was mapped out. The research questions that this thesis answered are as follows;

1. Do non-stereotypical portrayals of African Americans/non-whites prime white audience members to take a favourable view of race relations in general?
2. How do viewers of Shondaland television shows interpellate the stories told in Shondaland into their interactions with people in their social world?
3. Is there a correlation between watching Shondaland and having stronger endorsement for groups like BLM or other 'minority' issues?

Throughout chapters four to six I unpacked and answered each of these questions. For question one, as discussed in section 6.5, television shows that had non-stereotypical

portrayal of African Americans or non-white characters did tend to prime the white participants who watched them into having a more favourable view toward African Americans. However, these participants still viewed US race relations as having a long way to go on the whole. The one participant, Michael, who saw the fewest portrayals of Black characters had the least sympathy towards African Americans and the issue of race relations. Among the other six participants were varying levels of empathy for racial issues, but they were generally positive about drawing attention to racial inequalities in the US.

Those participants who watched Shondaland television shows tended to interpellate the message and stories told in those shows in different ways. Chris internalised the message of racial equality in these post-racial television shows in a way that produced a high level of empathy for BLM as well as other discriminated groups, such as women. As discussed in section 5.2, Emily, Jessica and Chris all talked about women's rights as an important issue to them. The Shondaland shows are all female-led shows, carrying a theme of female empowerment, which all three Shondaland participants have interpellated into how they interact with people in their social world. I argue that Shondaland viewing had an impact on BLM endorsement or empathy, but I would not say that it was Shondaland television shows that exclusively created this relationship. Matt and Samantha are not Shondaland viewers, but they watched other racially diverse television shows, helping create a para-social contact that led to their empathy with BLM and race relations in general.

While this thesis used a small sample size (seven participants), because of its use of long form interviews and thick description in the analysis, there are conclusions that can be made, however these conclusions are not the ones that were originally hypothesised. It is clear through this analysis that multi-layered Black (and other non-white minorities) characters in television shows are important in teaching [white] viewers about people and experiences that they may never meet or experience. Television is a cultural educator, and it is through television that we learn about people who are not like us (Kellner, 2003). Viewing and connecting to characters who do not look like the participants led them to feeling generally empathetic (even if their empathy had some caveats) toward the BLM movement. This research has added to the literature surrounding para-social contact hypothesis by showing how [white] audiences parlay para-social contact with non-white television characters into attitudes towards real-life groups and events. The different representations that the participants viewed in their favourite television shows led them to

having different levels of empathy for BLM. By exploring how people come to have certain views or attitudes about different groups, television and audience researchers can show the importance of neutral to positive representations of Black and other non-white characters. Viewing these representations can impact how [white] viewers relate to Black and other non-white people in their real lives. We can only know about people we have never had a lived experience with through these mediated interactions. This para-social contact has a constructive impact on the way that people see others that do not look like themselves but is not the only mitigating factor.

While this these does achieve some comparison between the viewers of Shondaland and non-viewers, the aims of this thesis were not fully realised in the desired way. The strengths of this thesis lie outside of the anticipated results. This outcome is useful to media audience researchers, as there has historically been a tendency to focus on content, rather than audience practices that are inevitably messier than content studies imply. As every audience member decodes texts in different ways, it is also useful to understand why an audience member chooses to watch a particular text. While I selected fans of the Shondaland shows, so they all decoded the shows with a dominant reading (as the producers wanted them to read the text), they all took different meanings from the text and used those meanings to interpret real life social issues in different ways. Why an audience member chooses to watch one text over another could be an additional area to research.

Despite this research providing a coherent and sufficient conclusion, future research projects could attempt to recreate these conclusions with a larger sample, and without the limitation of using Shondaland television shows as the chosen diverse television shows. As can be seen in this thesis, other diverse television shows, such as *The Wire* and *Orange is the New Black*, also led participants to having more empathetic feelings toward BLM and racial inequality. The intersectionality of race, gender, sexuality and class did emerge as a theme in my participants interviews. The interaction of the different dimensions of oppression influence each other was an interesting outcome of the interviews, however due to the scope of this thesis, I focussed more on the racial issues. Future research could consider the intersectional issues and how they relate, as well as other, racially diverse television shows. Other areas that future research could explore could be audience practice based, finding people who support BLM (or another social issue, such as #MeToo) and then finding out what media texts they engage with and how these texts relate to their support (or opposition) to these social movements.

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Empire, (2015-2018) [TV] Created by Lee Daniels & Danny Strong, Fox, USA

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Game of Thrones, (2011-2018) [TV] Created by David Benioff & D. B. Weiss, HBO, USA

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Handmaid's Tale, (2017-2018) [Web Series] Created by Bruce Miller, Hulu, USA

How I Met Your Mother, (2005-2014) [TV] Created by Carter Bays & Craig Thomas, CBS, USA

How to Get Away with Murder (2014-2018) [TV] Created by Peter Nowalk, ABC, USA

House of Cards, (2013-2018) [Web Series] Created by Beau Willmon, Netflix, USA

Malcolm in the Middle, (2000-2006) [TV] Created by Linwood Boomer, Fox, USA

Master of None, (2015-2018) [Web Series] Created by Aziz Ansari & Alan Yang, Netflix, USA

Narcos, (2015-2017) [Web Series] Created by Chris Brancato, Carlo Bernard & Doug Miro, Netflix, USA

Orange is the New Black, (2013-2018) [Web Series] Created by Jenji Kohan, Netflix, USA

Outrageous Fortune (2005-2010) [TV] Created by James Griffin & Rachel Lang, TV3, NZ

Parks and Recreation (2009-2015) [TV] Created Greg Daniels, Michael Schur, NBC, USA

Portlandia, (2011-2018) [TV] Created by Fred Armisen, Carrie Brownstein & Jonathan Krisel, IFC, USA

Roots, (1977) [TV] Created by Alex Haley, ABC, USA

Samurai Jack, (2001-2005 & 2017) [TV] Created by Genndy Tartakovsky, Cartoon Network, USA

Scandal, (2012-2018) [TV] Created by Shonda Rhimes, ABC, USA

Scrubs, (2001-2010) [TV] Created by Bill Lawrence, NBC & ABC, USA

Shameless, (2011-2018) [TV] Created by Paul Abbott, Showtime, USA

Sherlock (2010-2017) [TV] Created by Mark Gatiss & Steven Moffat, BBC One, UK

Shortland Street, (1992-2018) [TV] Created by Bettina Hollings, Caterina De Nave & Jason Daniel, TV2, NZ

South Park, (1997-2018) [TV] Created by Trey Parker & Matt Stone, Comedy Central, USA

Suits, (2011-2018) [TV] Created by Aaron Korsh, USA Network, USA

The Cosby Show, (1984-1992) [TV] Created by Ed Weinberger, Michael Leeson & Bill Cosby, NBC, USA

The Daily Show, (1999-2018) [TV] Created by Madeleine Smithberg & Lizz Winstead,
Comedy Central, USA

The InBetweeners, (2008-2010) [TV] Created by Damon Beesley & Iain Morris, E4, UK

The Office (US,) (2005-2013) [TV] Created by Ricky Gervais & Stephan Merchant, NBC,
USA

The Vampire Diaries, (2009-2017) [TV] Created by Julie Plec & Kevin Williamson, The
CW, USA

The Wire, (2002-2008) [TV] Created by David Simon, HBO, USA

Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt (2015-2018) [Web Series] Created by Tina Fey & Robert
Carlock, Netflix, USA

Wentworth, (2013-2018) [TV] Created by Lara Radulovich, David Hannam & Reg
Watson, SoHo & Showcase, Australia

Appendices

Appendix A – Participant Information Sheet



Investigation of Television Viewing Behaviour of Americans and New Zealanders and Socio-Political Views

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

Thank you for showing an interest in this project. Please read this information sheet carefully before deciding whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate we thank you. If you decide not to take part there will be no disadvantage to you and we thank you for considering our request.

What is the Aim of the Project?

This project is investigating if what people watch on television has an effect on their socio-political opinions and views. This project is being undertaken as part of the requirements for Chloe Banks's Master's Thesis.

What Types of Participants are being sought?

We are interested in interviewing 8 participants; four of whom will be fans of the television shows; *Grey's Anatomy*, *Scandal* and *How to Get Away with Murder*; and four whom do not watch these television shows. This will not be a representative sample due to the scope of the project. We are more interested in a detailed exploration of participant's television viewing behaviours and the potential relationship between this and participant's socio-political views.

What will Participants be asked to do?

Should you agree to take part in this project, you will be asked to sit down to a 1-2 hour interview in-person or over Skype where participants will be asked about the kind of

television shows they watch, and their views and opinions on different political groups or movements and some sensitive questions regarding race relations.

Please be aware that you may decide not to take part in the project without any disadvantage to yourself.

What Data or Information will be collected and what use will be made of it?

Only members of the research team will be privy to the raw data and the names of all participants will be kept private. The data collected will be securely stored in such a way that only those mentioned below will be able to gain access to it. Data obtained as a result of the research will be retained for **at least 5 years** in secure storage. Any personal information held on the participants such as contact details, voice recordings and/or transcriptions may be

destroyed at the completion of the research even though the data derived from the research will, in most cases, be kept for much longer or possibly indefinitely.

The results of the project may be published and will be available in the University of Otago Library (Dunedin, New Zealand) but every attempt will be made to preserve your anonymity.

On the Consent Form you will be given options regarding your anonymity. Please be aware that should you wish we will make every attempt to preserve your anonymity. However, with your consent, there are some cases where it would be preferable to attribute contributions made to individual participants. It is absolutely up to you which of these options you prefer.

This project involves an open-questioning technique. The general line of questioning include; television viewing habits, socio-political views and race relations. The precise nature of the questions that will be asked have not been determined in advance, but will depend on the way in which the interview develops. Consequently, although the Department of Media, Film and Communications is aware of the general areas to be explored in the interview, the Committee has not been able to review the precise questions to be used.

In the event that the line of questioning does develop in such a way that you feel hesitant or uncomfortable you are reminded of your right to decline to answer any particular question(s).

Can Participants change their mind and withdraw from the project?

You may withdraw from participation in the project at any time and without any disadvantage to yourself.

What if Participants have any Questions?

If you have any questions about our project, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact either:-

Chloe Banks

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This study has been approved by the Department stated above. However, if you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the research you may contact the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee through the Human Ethics Committee Administrator (ph 03 479-8256). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated and you will be informed of the outcome.

Appendix B – Participant Consent Form



***Investigation of Television Viewing Behaviour of Americans and New Zealanders and
Socio-Political Views
CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS***

I have read the Information Sheet concerning this project and understand what it is about. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I am free to request further information at any stage.

I know that:-

1. My participation in the project is entirely voluntary;
 2. I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without any disadvantage;
 3. Personal identifying information such as audio-recordings will be destroyed at the conclusion of the project but any raw data on which the results of the project depend will be retained in secure storage for at least five years;
 4. This project involves an open-questioning technique. The general line of questioning includes television viewing habits, socio-political views and race relations. The precise nature of the questions which will be asked have not been determined in advance, but will depend on the way in which the interview develops and that in the event that the line of questioning develops in such a way that I feel hesitant or uncomfortable I may decline to answer any particular question(s) and/or may withdraw from the project without any disadvantage of any kind.
 5. The results of the project may be published and will be available in the University of Otago Library (Dunedin, New Zealand) but every attempt will be made to preserve my anonymity.
 6. I, as the participant:
 - a) agree to being named in the research, ☐
 - b) would rather remain anonymous.] ☐
- OR;

I agree to take part in this project.

.....
(Signature of participant)

.....
(Date)

(Printed Name)

Appendix C – Shondaland Interview Schedule

- Which of the three shows is your favourite and could you tell me a little about why?
- Who is your favourite character and could you tell me a little about why?
 - o Is this also the character you identify with the most/if not who is?
- What character makes you the most frustrated/or the one that you like the least?
Can you tell me why?
- What character if any, do you have mixed feelings about, or a love/hate relationship with?
 - o Could you explain why?
- When did you first get introduced to the Shondaland show?
- How do you watch these shows? On television, streamed online, etc
- What words would you use to describe the following characters
 - o Meredith Grey
 - o Jackson Avery
 - o Miranda Bailey
 - o Alex Karev
 - o Olivia Pope
 - o Eli/Rowan Pope
 - o Fitzgerald Grant
 - o Mellie Grant
 - o Annelise Keating
 - o Wes
 - o Bonnie
 - o Connor
- What other television shows do you like?
 - o Who is your favourite character in that show?
 - o Which character do you identify with the most?
- Do your friends/family also watch any or all of the shows?
 - o Do you discuss what happens in the show with friends/family?
 - o Do you discuss what happens in the shows online with ‘strangers’ or on social media platforms like Twitter/facebook/reddit?
- Do you follow any of the actors/producers on social media?
 - o Why do you follow/not follow them on social media?

- Do you often pay attention to the things that they post?
- Do you ever interact with these people/pages? By commenting, liking, retweeting etc?
- Did you pay much attention to what these actors were saying during the last US election?
 - If so, what did you think/feel about what they were saying or the candidate they were promoting?
- When *Grey's Anatomy* was created Shonda Rhimes made an effort to colour-blind cast, which means she did not write physical descriptions of any of the characters. What do you think about this?
- In 2014 Shonda Rhimes became the first African American showrunner ever to have a three-hour block of prime-time television scheduling on a major network. What do you think about this?
- Has there ever been an episode of any Shondaland show that made you rethink something or brought to your attention something you hadn't realised or noticed before?
- Was there an episode of any Shondaland show that caused a strong emotive response that you can recall?
- Why do you think these shows are so popular?
- Do you often interact with people that come from a different/diverse background from you?
 - Are they friends? Family? Acquaintances?
 - Why do you think you do/do not interact with people that are/you consider different from you?
- Do you keep up with current events?
 - In what form do you do this? Television news? Newspaper? Online news sites? Social media? Political television shows?
 - What is your favourite form of news media?
- What social or political issues do you feel strongly about? And could you expand on why they are important/why you feel strongly about them?
- Do the television shows that you watch reflect any of these issues in any way, in story-telling, casting, setting etc?
 - Do the issues that you feel strongly about influence what you choose to watch on television?
- Is there any social/political issue that you think are over or under played?

- Could you expand on why you think this?
- Are there issues you think should get more attention? Or that does not get enough or the right kind of attention?
- What do you think about the state of race relations in the US?
 - What do you think about the state of race relations in NZ?
 - Could you expand on that?
- Could you please comment on the Black Lives Matter movement? Just your thoughts, feelings, or views about the movement
 - How much media coverage or what kind of media coverage have you seen of the groups?
 - Has the Black Lives Matter group/movement ever come up in one of your favourite television shows or a group with similar motives or grievances?

Appendix D – ‘Control’ Interview Schedule

- What kinds of television shows do you like?
- How do you watch television content usually? Streaming online, on television when it airs, or recording it on television then watching later? On a laptop or bigger screen?
- When do you usually watch television?
- What are your favourite television shows?
- What is it about them that you like?
- Is there a particular character that you really like? Can you tell me who and why?
- Is there a particular character that you really dislike or ‘love to hate’? Can you tell me who and why?
- Do your friends/family watch any of the same television shows as you?
 - o Do you talk about it with them?
 - o Do you discuss what happens in the shows online with ‘strangers’ or on social media platforms like Twitter/facebook/reddit?
- Do you follow any of the actors/producers on social media?
 - o Why do you follow/not follow them on social media?
 - o Do you often pay attention to the things that they post?
 - o Do you ever interact with these people/pages? By commenting, liking, retweeting etc?
 - o Did you pay much attention to what these actors were saying during the last US election?
 - If so, what did you think/feel about what they were saying or the candidate they were promoting?
- Have you ever heard of the television shows *Grey’s Anatomy*, *Scandal*, or *How to Get Away with Murder*?
 - o Have you ever watched an episode of any of these shows?
 - o What did you think about it?
 - o Why did you not continue to watch it?
 - o OR
 - o Why do you think you’ve never watched any of these shows?
- From what you’ve seen or heard of about all or any of the shows, do you think you could describe to me what you think each show is about?

- When *Grey's Anatomy* was created Shonda Rhimes made an effort to colour-blind cast, which means she did not write physical descriptions of any of the characters. What do you think about this?
- In 2014 Shonda Rhimes became the first African American showrunner ever to have a three-hour block of prime-time television scheduling on a major network. What do you think about this?
- Do you or have you ever watched a television show that has a diverse cast, or a cast of mainly non-white characters?
- Do you often interact with people that come from a different/diverse background from you?
 - o Are they friends? Family? Acquaintances?
 - o Why do you think you do/do not interact with people that are/you consider different from you?
- Do you keep up with current events?
 - o In what way do you do this? Television news? Newspaper? Online news sites? Social media? Political television shows?
 - o What's your favourite form of news media?
- What social or political issues do you feel most strongly about?
 - o Why that/these issues? What about them makes them feel/seem important/significant to you?
- Do the television shows that you watch reflect any of these issues in anyway, in story-telling, casting, setting etc?
 - o Do the issues that you feel strongly about influence what you choose to watch on television?
- Is there any social/political issue that you think are over or under played?
 - o Could you expand on why you think this?
- Are there issues you think should get more attention? Or that does not get enough or the right kind of attention?
- What do you think about the state of race relations in the US?
 - o What do you think about the state of race relations in NZ?
 - o Could you expand on that?
- Could you please comment on the Black Lives Matter movement? Just your thoughts, feelings, or views about the movement
 - o How much media coverage or what kind of media coverage have you seen of the groups?

- Has the Black Lives Matter group/movement ever come up in one of your favourite television shows or a group with similar motives or grievances?

Appendix E – Interview Transcripts

Michael's Interview Transcript

Bold – Interviewer Normal – Participant

So first question, what kind of television shows do you like to watch

Um I like a range of tv shows, more so sort of comedy, sitcoms um some sort of action ones, not really superhero ones. I hate the superhero franchises really. Like I mean my main favourites would probably be South Park, um I'm really into Scrubs at the moment, The Inbetweeners, Archer, Bob's Burgers

All good ones. How do you normally watch television, like on the tv or online

Uh online.

On your laptop or

Yeah plug it into the tv sometimes

Would you do that by yourself, like plug it into the tv or only with other people

Um just well I've got a tv in my room so yeah

When do you ususally watch tv

Uh usually later at night, so like 11pm-2am

Oh wow. And why do you watch it at that time period

Oh just studying until relatively late, and girlfriend comes over late and then we start watching things

So what would be your absolute favourite tv shows?

The Inbetweeners would definitely have to be there, South Park. Definitely say those two, cant think of any other ones

That's all good.

Yeah oh I definitely love ones like Malcolm in the Middle, um How I Met Your Mother,

What is it about these tv shows that you like?

Um like some of the ones like How I Met Your Mother are just kind of relatable aspect to it. Just the kind of somewhat normal. And slightly bit more extravagant sort of way um South

Park is cause of how they can sort of really dig into quite serious issues. While making complete fun of a lot of different groups, which I quite enjoy. Um yeah

So you don't watch any dramas or anything like that?

Um not hugely anymore. Like when I was younger I liked watching ones like Lost and Fringe but they're more kind of sci-fiey in a way. I don't know

So nowadays just more into the comedy?

Yeah its just easy to watch and not too hard to follow along with.

Is there a particular character that you really like in any of these tv shows

Um I'd have to say, with watching Bob's Burgers there's a character called Louise in it. She's the youngest daughter and very overly blunt and quite ridiculous. They work in like a burger store and she was, the dad told her not to change any of the special burgers so she obviously changed it and she put a burger called the Child Molestor, comes with free candy. Haha so yeah, the pure bluntness of that

And like the naughtiness?

Yeah

Is there a particular character in any of those shows that you really dislike or like love to hate

Um not sure, I kind of, when I do dislike characters its because of a clear unfairness. Like when something is absolutely clearly supposed to be right and that's how things are supposed to be going and they just go against it for their own will, for their own benefit. That's when I do dislike characters. Um

So I guess it's a bit harder to find that in a sitcom

Oh I guess, as well my other favourite tv show is The Walking Dead, no not The Walking Dead, I've gone off that. Game Of Thrones, yep.

I was wondering that cause almost everyone watches GOT. So is there a particular character on there that you love to hate

Ohh I definitely love to hate Joffrey, that's a bit of an easy one yeah.

Is there a character on GOT that you really love?

Hmm, not sure. Probably the direwolves. Yeah I guess actually from there a character I really did quite dislike was Catelyst Stark cause she always put her own interests ahead of what

was truly better for the greater good of what was better for the war and everything. I just found her really infuriating

Do your friends/family watch any of the same tv shows as you

Family, not at all parents probably watch like Coronation Street and a couple of gardening shows and that's it. Antiques Roadshow, well not Antiques Roadshow but along those kind of lines. Um friends, yeah they probably watch similar ones, definitely along the lines of like South Park and GOT

And you said you watch tv with your girlfriend so you both like to watch the same stuff

Yeah shes mostly shaped my influence of tv shows over the past year

Do you talk about what happens in tv shows with your friends then?

Um things like GOT yeah, like discuss what could be happening and theories and stuff

Do you go deep dive on the internet for theories

Oh I try not to, like occasionally once in a while when you see stuff pop up on Facebook, someone's talking about this, and you start looking into it a little bit but never too deep

Would you ever discuss what happens in a tv show online with strangers, or like on social media like twitter, Facebook or reddit

No, I try to avoid interacting with strangers on, like unless its. I can get a bit riled up on some certain debates on Facebook, just the anti-vaxxer ones yep

Do you follow any of the actors or people related to the tv shows on social media

Um, I may do. I'm not sure, so probably safe to say if I did they wouldn't have an influence on me

Um so I suppose if you cant remember if you do or not I guess you don't pay attention to what they say?

Not really no **Just if it pops up?** Yeah if other people are sharing it or if it comes up on ladbible, like this persons made this comment or something like that

Do you ever interact with these people or pages, by liking or commenting or retweeting or anything like that

Um yeah like the pages for the tv shows? Yeah I generally like them, keeps you updated with things

And you'd like it if they posted like a promo or that kind of thing?

Yeah, tag the girlfriend in it if its something we watch

Nice, um did you pay much attention to what these people were saying during the last US election? Or I guess since you watch South Park what was there kind of commentary like on there

It was very, very interesting. Well considering they had to, cause they had the episode planned out assuming that Hillary was going to win and then they had to completely rewrite it in two or three days um it was quite interesting, and they're whole portrayal of Trump being a bit of a dumbass who didn't know what he was doing they did that pretty well. Yeah it was very, it was very interesting

Did they air the Hillary episode or just bin it completely?

Um I cant remember, I think they turned it into some crazy sort of woman wondering why she didn't win I think.

Um but then other than on the screen did anyone else related to the shows you like that you saw supporting either Hillary or Trump

I knew people that were obviously a lot of people were supporting Hillary and what not but nothing as so related to the shows

Have you ever heard of the television shows GA, Scandal or HTGAWM

Yeah I've heard of them

Have you ever watched any of these shows

No,

Not at all? Why do you think you've never watched any of these shows

Just haven't quite interested me, just not really interested in medical dramas, like Scrubs is a bit different cause its much more light-hearted um idk they look quite the same of someone dies, and they save them at the last second and so and so on for twenty season or however many they're up to at the moment.

So you're more into comedies or sci-fi/fantasy?

Yeah

So theres just a couple more questions about these shows. From what you've seen or heard about these shows, could you describe to me what you think each show is about?

Um Greys Anatomy, some kind of hospital sort of drama, apparently a lot of the main characters die. Um HTGAWM I think its some lawyer? Who teaches law and that's about as much as I know. **And Scandal?** And Scandal, I think that's some sort of political drama I think

You did better than most people, you got the gist. Um cool, When *Grey's Anatomy* was created Shonda Rhimes made an effort to colour-blind cast, which means she did

not write physical descriptions of any of the characters. What do you think about this?

Sounds pretty good yeah. It shouldn't be what you really look like, unless its supposed to be this dashing young man, and you get some sort of old wrinkly bastard turning up

And in terms of like creating a diverse cast, do you think that's quite a useful thing to do in the tv industry?

Yeah, yeah I guess yeah. It's a good idea. Its an easy way to take any bias out of it. And probably a good way to make sure that you get the best people for the role, if you take out your own like sort of racial biases

In 2014 Shonda Rhimes became the first African American showrunner ever to have a three-hour block of prime-time television scheduling on a major network. What do you think about this?

I think that would be an achievement for anyone, regardless of their gender or race. Um yeah

Have you ever or do you ever watch tv shows with a diverse cast or a cast of mainly non- white people?

Um, I guess the cast of Scrubs is oh its like somewhat (sounds unsure) diverse? Um yeah its still obviously like 50% white and but other than that, none that I can really think of

That's all good, um do you often interact with people that come from a different or diverse background to you?

Um not hugely. Yeah nah

Um why do you think that you don't interact with people that you'd consider different from yourself?

Um I think, like the main thing is that I don't have the exposure. Like when you're back in first year in a hall then there's obviously a lot more variety of people there. So you do end up mixing and meeting a lot more so, but now fourth year sort of own group of friends and yeah

That's all good. Fair enough. Do you keep up with current events?

Um somewhat, from what I see popping up on facebook and what not

So is that the main way that you do it just whatever pops up

Yeah, yeah. I follow like the news pages and what not

What news pages do you follow?

Um NZ Herald, Stuff by proxy I think NewsHub comes up from everyone else liking it.

Um I get it through LadBible and other various sites like that

Are there any international news sites that you follow on facebook or anything like that?

No.

Um and when they pop up on facebook do you just read the headline and the short little blurb or do you click into them?

Um depends what it is. Say when it was the Manchester bombings I went into that and read that to see what was happening. It depends on the headline really. If its something that interests me then I'll have a look and if its not then

What kind of headlines interest you

Um, quite interested in obviously, seeing some of the vaccine debates and stuff, it shouldn't be a debate, but they're popping up at the moment. So I have a little read of that and make me feel very sad for society and then try to leave the internet for a little while. Other than that I see things like the crappy health tip things I'll look at those to see how wrong they are for most of them. **So those click-bait?** Yeah a little bit and interested to see how stuff they put out there. Sometimes interesting political ones, probably more like your scandal sort of thing or like your shock or Trump has just said this about this group or whatever,

Um would you click through on like local politics?

I don't really have too much of a bother about local politics. Even though I probably should. Or like national politics a little bit more? **Yeah that's more what I meant.** As for Dunedin local politics nah, like we all probably know that David Seymour or whatever his name is is probably going to get North Dunedin again.

But national politics?

Um a little bit. Of again, more sort of interesting sort of headlines. Or if someone has released some new interesting sounding policy or whatnot.

Cool um. What would you say would be your favourite form of news media?

Like through Facebook?

Yeah or like online sites, so yeah facebook but by proxy online news sites

Yeah online news sites yeah

Cool so you don't watch the news on tv or anything

No, no, we don't have freeview or anything

Oh so its basically just a screen for ya?

Yep

So out of the online news site, like Stuff or Herald is there one you prefer over the other?

I think the Herald seems to be a little bit better, a little bit less click-bait than Stuff. Yeah

What social or political issues do you feel most strongly about?

Um obviously, definitely the vaccine thing, I feel very strongly about that. **Could you talk a little bit more about that?** Yeah oh **Release some feelings** You really want me to say? **Yeah** If I could I'd put them all on an island and chuck some small pox in there with them and see how they go. And in terms of those people it almost brings out eugenics thoughts in me. Which is, I know, very, very out there. Its probably the most extreme view that you've had so far. But when you've got people who say have HIV or kids who have bone

cancer that are very susceptible to these treatable, preventable diseases then, they're killing kids. And you see that happening in America at the moment, with Andrew Wakefield and his influence which is also tied to Trump, another reason no to like him. Um other sorts of issues um, I guess sort of along the lines of that just the spread of sort of pseudo-science, kind of stuff. Just a lot of that bullshit. And organic farming. I'm very, quite against that **Oh why's that?** A lot of the science says that there is very little benefit to it, yet the amount of more land that you need to produce the same amount of food is significantly higher so you've got much higher resources need for food that will cost you more, with no actual added benefit. Which then leads on to like GMO's which could cure the world. And then you have people like groups like GreenPeace that have vehemently sort of against it the they're also blocking um like golden rice. Which is this genetically modified rice that has that can produce vitamin A which was developed for kids in South East Asia where there is I think it's 100,000 who die each year from this deficiency, you can go blind and what not and because its sort of a genetically modified food, its evil and what not and like GreenPeace and whatnot want to keep it out of there and

What do you study btw?

Microbiology

Ah I thought it must be something sciencey. So with the um so its all mostly science based stuff that youre interested in and feel strongly about

Yeah definitely

So with the pseudo-science stuff what kind of things about it make you angry

So there are particular news sites, like NaturalNews and CollectiveEvolution and its like I feel like its like healing with the mind. Like obviously the mind does have a strong influence your health and whatnot and the placebo effect but the extent to where they are like abandon modern medicine and meditate everyday and all of your problems will be gone. Things like that.

So also just people that are into natural healing and not putting things into your body?

Yeah, some of these things are often more dangerous than others

So other than those kind of scienceyish issues, are there any other social or political issues that

Uh um, **You mentioned Trump a couple of times?** Um Trump is a very interesting character obviously. Um yeah I'm not really, like some things like immigration, I slightly agree with. **Like what?** I do find it quite hard to judge because like obviously from a scientific point of view I'm very used to saying this is the fact, its been tested its been proven but then when you get these other things you cant trust whats real and whatnot, as there is always the fact of when you bring in a lot more different ethnic groups and they begin to form their own sort of, sort of area in a say a city or a suburb then from what I've sort of seen throughout the times, especially in England I think they have a lot of problems with that, especially with Muslim communities and African communities you get a lot more crime in some of these areas, not necessarily more than the main populous. But obviously these communities stick together to keep their culture and whatnot but they kind of try to segregate themselves from the country that they've moved to, which I think, it may sound really bad but I think they, I don't want to say integrated into society, cause that's sounding like the old Australian um oh what was the, when they tried to outbreed the Aborigines, I don't want to be sounding like that, but they need to be interacting and be involved in the culture that they've moved into. And I think if we could have that then we could ease a lot of peoples minds, especially the Far Right which is like trying to ban immigration and is like don't let Muslims in and obviously would help the Left a little bit cause theyre allowing these people to come in and what not.

Is there anything else that you agree with about Trump or with Trump or disagree with

Um, not that I'm aware of. I'm not fully up on all his policies

That's all good, but that's one that you've noticed and thought that's not a bad idea?

Yeah well its kind of its easy to agree with at times like this, especially after the Manchester bombings and these people have been taken into this country and then they go and blow up and kill a whole bunch of children and whatnot.

Yeah its hard to not feel that at this time

Yeah to have that response to it. Obviously you know that it's a minority and it's a very, very small amount of people yeah

Um what is it about these issues that we've talked about, what about them makes you feel strongly about them, or makes them feel important

Um the science ones is just clearly the evidence is there, and theres just this utter rejection of it, because usually these people are thinking that there's a government conspiracy behind it. And um things like that are just, like Bill Gates is trying to depopulate the world with vaccines, that's a good one. Yeah yeah and they think all the ingredients in vaccines are toxins and are going to kill you and give you autism and give you other diseases, some don't even exist, they've just been made up by these groups and like the utter rejection of what is true is what gets me, I guess it comes back to my thoughts on the tv characters that things have to be fair

Would you say that you're quite a black and white kind of person?

Yep, yeah and I'm aware of that, so I do try to see grey sometimes where possible but I am yeah quite a black and white person. I think the fact that I'm aware of it is a bit better, that I can see my own flaws of understanding and

Do any of the tv shows that you watch reflect any of these issues in anyway?

Um I think South Park probably would be the main one. Um like um I'm not sure exactly how it would influence me but its sort of reinforces my idea that Trump is just this idiot who wants to fire missiles at anyone and everyone and um, probably do a whole section, in the latest of the season before on the American superchain called Whole-Foods and how its organic and they charge you \$100 for a few items that sort of thing like that.

So it reinforces your view on that? Yeah do the issues that you feel strongly about influence what you choose to watch on television?

Um I guess, not necessarily initially, but if I was to start watching a show and they start spouting out about all this homeopathy kind of stuff then I'd be like I'm not watching this, like I personally would just be able to stand it.

Are there any social or political issues that you think are over or under played in the media?

Um I guess, like I feel a bit maybe like the bathroom trans kind of social identity things, a little bit overplayed. Like I'm a straight white male, so I do struggle to understand a lot of where they're coming from. But I feel like its such a minority issue, like you're looking at less than 1% of the population most likely, and its making up quite a large amount of the media coverage and while these peoples views do matter, its idk I feel like its something that is over represented maybe. Idk, I'm not really sure where I stand, like obviously these people it's the way they feel but some of them, are just a bit idk its sort of out there. Like its sort of an attention sort of thing, not saying that they don't genuinely feel that like I understand

that you can be into girls, boys, both that sort of thing but I don't understand why there are 50 different gender identities or sexuality and I cant grasp that. I can understand if you wanna sleep with 10 different people or something like that at different times, but I don't see why things like that need different terms

Is there any issue that you think is underplayed then?

Underplayed, hmm um I'm not sure

All good, are there any issues that you think should get more attention than they already do or that aren't getting the right kind of attention?

Um hmm, what was the question again sorry

Are there any issues that you think should get more attention or don't get the right kind of attention?

Um hmm, I guess in some ways some of the things I guess with the organic farming, its not really a publicly known thing. Most people just assume that natural is better and a lot of that is never really told to the public, and naturally you'd get a lot of hate for trying to say that to the general public or even a lot of people, um its not really an issue at all, well not yet. Obviously with a growing populatate and growing world population and people wanting to move more into the sort of less efficient form of farming and then you do get like essentially it will come back to bite people on the ass in terms of food production and not being able to sustain a population

With the organic farming thing, cause I don't know that much about it, is it more environmentally damaging than normal or just cause I don't know

I'm not sure I would say it would be, in terms of I'm not really sure on the impact of the environment but you're producing less food for less area and some of the pesticides that they do use that are certified for organic are often more dangerous to human health, just cause somethings natural doesn't mean its better um yeah

Um so this is the big scary question be prepared. What do you think about the state of race relations in the US

Woo. Its never going to be good. Its too many people with too many very extreme views. Cause NZ obviously were all centre left or centre right like most of us. Whereas in America you're very far left or very far right usually and that I think the very far right creates a lot of these issues, especially kind of your white sort of Americans and the kind of if you're not white you're not with us a little bit. Not saying that some of them can't be, theres um that old joke that you have an African American friend so you're not racist. In general no I don't think race relations in America is ever going to be good. They've got too many enemies, they represent kind of the how its always been the American dream if you move to America you start again whatnot but I guess with how that's like americans don't always want people

moving there, they just want America all to themselves and I guess with all the conflicts America has gotten into its just they make a few enemies

Would you say race relations in America are better now than they have been or worse?

Um, I would say over time they're getting better. Oh. They've probably been a steep decline after 9/11 I would assume **In relation to?** Like Muslims and towards them. Um but I would assume its been better, I think generally as society we are still progressing and we become a bit more tolerant of everyone, I feel like it just takes a bit of time and exposure yeah, that sort of it just takes a bit of time

Do you think there are is getting, like in terms of television at least like more exposure of different people of different cultures than there used to be?

Oh definitely yeah I think its just become a bit more accepted that, that because your Asian or your black or whatever that you cant be on tv cause back in the day you wouldn't be seen dead on tv or maybe that was the only time you were on tv when you were dead.

Yep. In contrast to that what do you think about the state of race relations in NZ

Relatively okay. Um like there is always going to be, I think some of the main things you've got is a divide between white people and Asians I think they dislike them, especially in Auckland. A lot of them taking over the idea of them buying up houses, I'm not one hundred percent sure on the actual facts of that but there is always the myth of all the Asians buying up all the houses and we now cant afford a house and we don't like the Asians because of that kind of thing. There is always probably going to be issues between Maori and Pakeha um just the general distrust between there and the typical assumption that Maori's are always committing crimes um that's kind of reflected a little bit in the prison system where 50% of them are Maori and I guess that could also be discrimination from police officers and the whole trail down the road from that

Anything else, any other groups, like minority groups that you feel, or would you say that Asians and Maori are the main two?

I would say that they're the main two. I think the other groups in NZ don't have a huge presence as such, maybe in more of an issue in Auckland. Like say in Dunedin, like Dunedin is a very white place, but in saying that to Canterbury they have like the skinheads that are up there the far right kind of. So I guess its very different from area to area

So where did you grow up?

Um North West Auckland, a small little town up there

What do you think about the BLM?

Hmm, I'm not yeah well they're sort of pushing for the, my understanding is that they're mostly just for cops not to shoot black people. That's sort of I'm not sure of the exact like statistics on it things but any time that a black person is shot by the police there is a huge media representation of it, even though necessarily may not be representative of other shootings by police um and I think things like that could potentially be over represented,

which negatively reinforces it in my mind almost makes it not matter so much. Well not that it doesn't matter so much but I kind of think that these people are a bit out there a bit crazy and I don't quite know how to say what I'm thinking. Obviously shooting anyone is bad, unless it's a situation where it kind of has to be done. Um and I guess in America you do have situations where you do have racist cops that are overly trigger happy which I guess is a thing with America's gun culture. Like that's my views on BLM like all lives matter more than anything it shouldn't necessarily just be a race-based kind of thing. Um yeah I think my views on that do extend to other things like in relation to things like feminism, in that in most modern-day kind of, like say America and NZ and stuff, generally we're all pretty equal, but obviously there are disparities within each **Kind of subset?** like especially in things like especially suicide for men the rates are way, way higher and I'm not sure about where the wage thing, I'm not gonna its hard to sort of see that, without getting someones opinion on that without seeing the actual statistics, so I just kind of stay out of that one. Yeah

Um so being in NZ what kind of media coverage do you see of the BLM group

Um I guess sort of see things, kind of rallies or a black persons been shot by police or whatever and the news coverage of that, and coming through in different versions of social media and yeah

Um has the BLM group ever come up in any of the tv shows you watch?

May of came up in South Park, I'm sure it would of um I can't think, I'm not sure in relation to where it has.

That was all the questions I had did you have questions for me?

Nah that's all good.

Ashley's Interview Transcript

Bold = Interviewer Normal = Participant

First question, what kind of television shows do you like? You told me to prepare and I'm like I don't know

That's all good

I watch, idk, I watch a lot of the generic ones, like I loved me some Gossip Girl back in the day and stuff, so I used to watch that one last year. Yeah what have I binged watched lately. Oh I tried watching criminal minds but I couldn't get into that one. I like, I like, oh god. Oh I like Suits, Suits is a goody um oh a bit of Wentworth, a bit of Orange Is The New Black. Um

So more like dramas than sitcoms?

Yeah uh, like on the spot uh I'm trying to think. What have I been watching? Oh my god, I'm so sorry.

Its all good

I've watched so much stuff lately and I don't know. Like none of the ones you listed. Idk like all the generic ones. Like I feel like there's loads of like psych ones lately but at the same time I haven't watched HTGAWM or anything. Ooh 13 Reasons I watched that. I liked Sherlock, I always go for like, Sherlock isn't a comedy of anything, but like easy watching, idk

Its all good, if you think of others as we go through just say. Do you watch reality tv shows or anything like that?

Uh, like a little bit but not really. I never got into Dance Mom's or anything, everyone was like watch Dance Moms' and I was like eugh. Like idk, a little bit of old Keeping up with the Kardashians but not too much.

Just kinda like if it was on you'd watch it but not really?

Watched a few episodes of the bachelor (NZ) but then was like nah that's a bit shit. Yeah idk sorry.

Yeah no that's good, like I said if stuff comes up just say. Um and how do you normally watch television content on tv or online?

Yeah definitely online, I don't know the last time I watched something on a tv, I stream everything its so bad

That's all good, what kind of streaming sites do you use?

Uh watchseries, classic, good old ad blocker for that one. Yeah that's my main go to. I'm too cheap to get Netflix. But yeah sometimes TVNZ or whatever if it's a NZ show or whatever, but yeah definitely mainly watchseries its got all the goods

So when do you usually watch tv?

Like evening I guess, like pretty much if I've got free time or like you know when you've been doing too much study and you need to clear my head and (CLAPS) Brooklyn Nine Nine I've been watching that one! And its good cause its like 20min episodes so it's a real easy like study break. Um yeah idk just like inbetween study or at night, maybe if I wanna watch something to make me tired or whatever,

Just like before bed or

Yeah

What would be your favourite tv show, of all time

Of all time? .. Probably Outrageous Fortune. Um classic. Yeah I like binge-watched it in first year and it was like, it just brought back all the memories and

All the music and

Yeah like whenever I hear the theme song I'm like (dances in her chair) take me back

What is it about Outrageous Fortune that you like

Um I think a lot of it is because its quite relateable. Like its like NZ. And its like the amount of stuff that's like well okay not like its stuff that would happen but it sort of it was funny because of how close to home it was in a certain sense. Not like idk, like its New Zealand its funny, like

Kinda like seeing yourself kind of like not you yourself but like you identify with the jokes

Yeah! Exactly! Like NZ jokes and stereotypes and things and you're just like hah yes!

Cool, was there a particular character on that show that you really liked?

Uhh oh what was his name, Van. Cause he was real like not up to much and it was good like comic value. And um what was her name, Pascall, cause shes just a ditz. Once again just great comic value.

Definitely. was there a particular character that you disliked or "loved to hate"

Yeah, um who did I not like. Oh who was that guy, um oh I can see his face in my head but I have no idea what character he was. He was like a bad guy

Oh yep

Oh the one that went out with like everyone and he was real old. I have no idea what his name was but he went out with oh what was the smart one called the girl.

Oh I can only think of the actresses name yeah yeah the

Yeah the girl in the family. He went out with her for ages and he was like 30 or whatever

Shane Cortese?

I have no idea like what his actual name was

Like tan with blond hair?

No. Oh oh yes yes! And he was getting like with Pascall and then he was like ohhehh. Loved to hate him. He turned into a little bit of a dick

Yeah nah that's all good, just like he did on Shortland Street

Yes!

Awesome, so do any of your friends or family watch the same tv shows as you?

Umm a little bit. I like never watch shows with people cause youre always at like different stages and then some will watch ahead and your like omg don't show me. But um I think idk, like back when I used to live at home, my brothers and I would watch Outrageous Fortune and all that jazz um but idk, like everyones watched like the generic ones you can always like strike up a conversation with someone like omg Gossip Girl. But nah yeah

Would you talk about it with other people, say if you were watching Sherlock, would you talk to someone else who like watches Sherlock

Oh yeah like Wentworth at the moment. Everyone keeps going like what is she up to? And I'm a little bit behind at the moment, so I'm like stop telling me like it will just be on the snapchat group chat. And I'll be like stop and they're just like What is she doing. Like that sort of thing

Do you ever discuss what happens in a tv show online with strangers? Like on Facebook, twitter, reddit?

Nah. I'm not too much of a keyboard warrior

Do you follow any actors or producers of your favourite tv shows on social media at all?

Hmm definitely some actors. Uh like you'll be like they're funny or whatever, and stalk them on Instagram. Like oh like back in the day when I was really into Vampire Diaries I went and got all of them like Klaus and stuff, I was like oh he's so hot. When and stalked them all. Like the voice I was like mmmm. So yeah theres like a few of them. Omg and like people from H2O that came onto The Originals was like honestly the whole cast. It was like where was Rikki. So I've got all of them on my wee stalker Instagram

Do you ever pay attention to the things that they post?

Nah, oh well like in terms of when they're doing promos or stuff? Or

Yeah, or if they're talking about social issues or just heres my breakfast, heres me and my friends

Yeah I'm really bad like if it says see more and its some massive paragraph I'm like mh scroll. Like idk I'm not. Like half the time its just them telling a real crap story. But you

know, when its like a photo of their dog, I'm like oh hello. But yeah in terms of the actual captions I don't look at that. I'm just like that's a nice photo.

No that's fair enough. Do you ever interact with these people or pages, but commenting, liking or retweeting ?

Uh I'll like their stuff if its got like a dog. But I hate those people who are like so and so posted a photo I have to like it because its them. I'm like does it have a dog in it. Like is it funny? Then there are those people who are like ohmygod it's a photo of his shoe and I'm like (shivers). But um yeah

Just liking and lurking basically?

Yeah I'm not one to comment

Did you pay attention to what these actors/actresses were posting during the last US election?

Mmh, like definitely when I was scrolling through and stuff it was all like "I'm With Her" like every single one. It got to the point where you weren't even looking at who it was anymore you were just like yep we get it.

So with everyone supporting Hillary how did you feel about that?

Um if I'd been in America I would have been supporting her as well. So I was kinda like cool. It was interesting how it blew up to the whole I'm with her thing and everyone was like promoting that they were with her and trying to get their followers to be like they think like omg he thinks that I have to think that, if we vote for the same person we'll get married. Which sadly probably would work, because its America.

How do you feel about actors or actresses or just famous people supporting one political person over another, like do you think that's an okay thing to do

I mean like you do you, definitely in that situation I was like you know, go you. But like idk people often are like posting something that's like serious or whatever people are like 'eugh who cares' and sometimes I am like that. But like other times you are like 'oh good on you' raising awareness, etc, etc like good cause

So have you ever heard of the shows, Greys Anatomy, Scandal and HTGAWM

Yes.

Have you ever watched an episode of any of those shows?

Nah. Like I've seen, like everyone was talking about HTGAWM but I was just like eugh not another psychological whatever. Like I take psych papers and I hate it when people just try and be all like its every single show at the moment is some sort of psychological criminal, drama whatever. Like that's fine but its just all that's being pumped out at the moment and its just like psych, psych, psych and I'm like shutup its boring. Three years in too deep

So if you've never watched a full episode, why do you think you've never watched any of these shows

Last year like my whole flat was binge-watching Greys and I'd just get snapchats of everyone like crying "he died" and I'd be like oh. I just never got into Greys when I was younger and then now its got like 12 season or something and I don't got time for that. I just feel like medical dramas, like what can you do for 12 seasons. Like apart from kill people off. Like apparently theres like a musical episode or something. What's Scandal, like yeah I considered Scandal cause I was like ooh juicy. Its just something I've never got around to watching, like PLL is next on my list but at the same time, everyone's like oh it just dragged out everyone's, like start from season 5 you won't miss anything especially since its up to season 8 or 9 now and they still don't know who A is. Everyone is just like you have to watch it. Seems like a lot of effort and commitment.

From what you've seen and heard about all or any of the shows, could you describe what you think each show is about

HTGAWM seems like the easiest one to start with, um I believe it's the whole like psych class, but I also think its like something to do with law so its like psych/law. Um I'd like to assume that there was a bit of murder in there. Um one would assume its about covering up said murder with psych/law paper lead by that bloody lady. Um Idk. I feel like it just has one of those story lines like whodunit and then they found out whodunit and then they just have a bunch more seasons on whodunit this time. So its kind of unappealing in that sense. Then theres old Greys Anatomy, which I can only assume is Shortland Street on steroids

but without the whole Chris had another six kids. Guys its another of Chris' kids and Chris is like "sorry!". I haven't even watched it since bloody Joey, it was downhill from there. I actually have no idea about Scandal, I just like I always see the things on Facebook like the lil snippets, I just feel like shes always being like not a psycho but. Like Scandal is the one that I have no idea about, I assume its quite scandalous, maybe idk. Idk if she makes it her purpose to find out everyones drama or whether it just comes to her but. I have no idea about Scandal really.

That's all good. So when Grey's Anatomy was created Shonda Rhimes made an effort to colour-blind cast, which means she did not write physical descriptions of any of the characters. What do you think about this?

Its cool, its definitely really cool. Especially given how successful the show is. But its interesting cause like half the time you hear about people writing for a role with someone in mind or whatever, but that is actually quite cool. Especially for the actors cause they got to create the characters themselves and like and decide a little bit how they were. Like off topic, but Friends, Matt Le Blanc decided to make Joey dumb when he auditioned, like he was supposed to be just normal and then he made him dumb and they were like ooh that's good. Yeah it is quite cool, idk I feel like you wouldn't expect it to be good. Well like you wouldn't not expect it to, but like I just feel like, you know how a show is like really based on, like it's the storyline but its also the characters, cause you get really attached to them. You love them you hate them, what they look like, you can never imagine someone else doing them they're perfect for the role etc. And its kinda cool that its like you read this role quite nicely, you can have it. But yeah its quite cool

Cool. In 2014 Shonda Rhimes became the first African American showrunner ever to have a three-hour block of prime-time television scheduling on a major network. What do you think about this?

That's quite cool, I guess. Have like other people had that before?

Yeah, other white men have had that before

Mmmh okay. That's a good thing to put on your CV. Yeah that is a really good achievement and what not. Cause in America like the whole, women being like up there and stuff, like it's a big thing. I feel like in NZ its more like yeah whatever. I certainly do

see that that is a really good achievement and shows like how good she is. Maybe I should watch some of her stuff.

Have you or do you ever watched a tv show with a diverse cast?

Umm, I remember when I first started watching Suits, I thought it was Empire. I don't know what, like I got the names mixed up watching it, I was like this is really different to how I thought it would be and I was like, hmm this is very white. It took me so long to realise it was a different show. Normally what I watch, like American shows are usually quite a mix but I don't know. I guess none are really bias, oh well I guess they are all technically bias to white, but like idk I guess not. I never thought about it.

Do you ever interact with people who come from a different or diverse background from you?

In terms of like country or like?

In terms of country, demographic, however you would like to interpret it, maybe someone who grew up differently from you, like city versus country etc or different ethnicity or age, gender, sexuality, all those things you could write on a census about

Um yeah for sure. Like you just kinda meet people and that's that people from Nelson Club, like I'm from Nelson, but yeah you just kinda meet people but I feel like I just meet who I meet and you just click or whatever but its never really based on ew your from Auckland, sorry I have to go now.

So you would you say you have friends who come from different backgrounds to you

Yeah definitely

So why do you think that you do interact with people who are different from you

Its not intentional, its not something that crosses your mind, like you like a person or you don't like a person. Um idk, like if they're foreign or whatever your like oohoo tell me about yourself, youre so cool, youre from somewhere else. Um but yeah idk, I don't really go out of my way to be like, so whats your background?

Do you keep up with current events?

Mh like I know whats going on. But I've never been someone to sit down and read a newspaper. I get the Stuff notifications, um if a juicy headline pops up, I give it a read. But I don't go out of my way, like I never really watch the news, even at home, mum will put the news on and I'll go to my room.

So you'd say that the main way would be online news sites, or social media?

Yeah social media obviously, like I'm pretty sure I like the Herald and all that jazz so I get notifications, so you have like the gist of whats going on, without actively having to do it

So would you say that you often click into links on facebook and stuff?

Yeah, yeah like was it the Herald that went through the phase of all that clickbait. That was really funny um idk they would just have like hilarious titles, then you'd go into it and it would be like some really weird article, like what sandwich type are you.

What would you say would be your favourite form of news media then?

Like the outlet or the means of getting it?

Means of getting it really.

I guess Facebook, cause it's on your newsfeed so it's right there and from like watching somebody's bloody holiday in Bali to like breaking news. So it's convenient, you're always on Facebook, you're always scrolling its always there.

Do you have a preferred site that you like?

Um I guess Stuff. Cause it does everything. Was it Stuff that was doing the power rankings on the Bachelor

No that was The Spinoff

I remember reading them, I had no idea who the people were but they were so sassy I loved it

Are there any social or political issues that you feel strongly about?

Mmh I'm pretty like chilled person, I don't really get involved. Um. Oh my god! The flag debate though! I got pretty worked up about that! Like KEEP the flag! I got really worked up about it and then it turns out like I wasn't enrolled and stuff, and I went to vote and I was emailing them saying I'm enrolled and says I'm not enrolled and they were like okay we'll send you a thing and then it arrived and I never ended up sending it back. So I didn't end up voting. But we ended up keeping the flag so all was well. If we didn't then I would have been like dammit they needed my vote.

What was it about the flag issue that got you riled up?

It's a flag! Like why did we, like every option was like not flaggy, they were like sports flags, they weren't like idk, why did we need a new one. Everyone is like ohh blahdeblah were not like England, oh Great Britain sorry, we don't need the union Jack. I'm like who cares. It's a flag. People are going to get so confused, I was confused. Then there's just bloody John Key going, "I like this one" let's just get a new flag, and I'm just like Shut Up John shut up. Idk it really worked me up. People would tell me they wanted a new flag, and I'd be like what one do you want, and they'd be like oh this one, and I'd be like no its shit, you're wrong.

Fair enough, so there are no other social or political issues that

Uhh, umm not really. Oh like the whole Brexit thing. Cause I can get a British passport, so I was like uh when I finally go travelling you're ruining it. And then it turns out nothings actually happening or whatever. So I'm not actually getting my pitchfork out at anything. Like things that involve me I guess but there's not really a lot of that. It sounds selfish I guess but really people are only invested in things that affect you but like obviously like Trump and stuff, obviously that annoyed me that that was happening, but at the end of the day it doesn't affect me directly too much, so it was just like oh whatever happens, happens.

Are there any television shows that you watch that reflect any of these issues in anyway?

Probably not for those specific ones. I feel like television shows haven't really started rolling out there Trump jokes yet too much. Oh maybe some of them have.

But nothing that you watch

Yeah nothing has jumped out at me

Has any tv show ever brought to your attention an issue that you hadn't thought of before or

Shows are really good at doing the whole like normalising like um with like Wentworth and OITNB, they're so similar! They're like the same show except ones more dramatic and they're in different countries, like they're the exact same show. They both have a trans person and stuff and like normalising that and the struggles they go through and making idk more relatable for some people I guess and all that jazz. Um but what other, idk. But like shows always have like a message, like that's the point. Like there was a Brooklyn Nine Nine episode the other day I was watching it was about Terry, like there was a cop who tried to arrest him and stuff because he was black, and he was like what are you doing here, and he was like I live here. And then there was a whole episode on that and like the mistreatment feel, and I was like Ohh Terry. I can't think of many examples but shows always incorporate in like a meaning or a story like bringing attention to certain things. Like I can't think of things but yeah

So you'd see tv as more than just entertainment then

Yeah like obviously your aware of what they're trying to push at you, what they're trying to say. Often, you're just like yeah whatever, but like when you rewatch Simpson episodes and stuff it's like oh how did I miss this, it'll be such an issue or whatever. But like idk now I'm actually aware of things and you definitely kinda process it and you're like yeah yeah. But like when you're aware of it happening it's not necessarily gonna, like nothing on them has been like something that my opinion has been different to idk, I've never had anything, like eugh shes trans or like I don't care just you do you. So its never been something that I've been like didn't want to sway my opinion on or whatever. I'm aware of it happening but I'm just like yeah cool whatever.

Do the issues that you feel strongly about, influence what you choose to watch on tv

Um not those specific issues. Idk I feel that nothing I watch is really too effected by politics type thing. Cause I watch such generic like sitcoms etc, nothing that really touches on anything heavy or like trying to offend. Maybe if there was something that was like I love Trump, I'd be like ooh no maybe not. But yeah there's never been anything that's been touched on anything ever

Are there any issues that you think should get more attention?

Most shows are pretty good are pretty good at incorporating things and normalising them. They always do like generic sexuality or like gender type things, obviously a little bit on like race, but it's all like good. Idk I guess I feel like Americans are just real judgey, I feel like American tv for Americans like that's really good. I could just see some person from Texas or something being all opinionated with their 'I love Trump' but idk.

Just in general media as well, like in the news

I feel, hmm, yeah I'm really like I don't think there's anything that they don't touch on that they should. Like I'm sure there is a lot of serious things,

But nothing that comes to mind, or that

Yeah like they're covering all the basics. You've got like Shortland St that'll tell you all the medical stuff.

What do you think about the state of race relations in the US

Well, the whole like two sides type thing. I think of the of the US this sounds really bad but as kind of like pitchforky, like they just jump on bandwagons, like a lot of them are super ignorant they won't actually know what it is they are talking about but they'll just be like yeah and go with stuff like, educate yourself. But then there's like the whole other side of Americans who are so educated and like actually making a proper opinion. Like America certainly is a touchy place for like race. Like one of my friends is over there doing uni and stuff on a scholarship and she was saying that after Trump won the whole like dynamics of everything totally changed. Like people were full on getting attacked in the streets. Like overnight like Black people. She was like it's so scary, like I didn't want to leave my dorm everyone was like completely divided. Like you knew who was supporting who and then the outcomes and then there was this huge divide and everyone was like stress city. She was just like it was horrible, I wanted to leave; she did not want to be there. And cause her boyfriend is like black (looks uncomfortable saying the word) quotation marks here, like she said she was so scared for him, I don't want anything to happen to him. Cause you hear all those things about cops pulling people over and being fucking American cops, and she's all like it's so scary all that stuff. I met him, he came

here over summer and it was so great. I was just like aw. But yeah America is certainly not a great place

For race relations?

Yeah no.

What do you think about the state of race relations in NZ?

It's completely different. Like obviously there is like divide to a certain extent, but it's completely different, its way more chilled. You might make a joke or something about it, but it'll be a genuine joke, not like a trying to be a dick joke or like whatever. Like, like New Zealand is a pretty diverse country, like we have a little bit of everyone in and were super chill and accepting and stuff. Like obviously you still hear about retards saying stupid stuff, but NZ as a whole is just like shut up, you shut your mouth you shit. I feel like we're a really good country for like coming together like banding together and being like no. But on other things we're like super shit like I'm pretty sure our domestic violence is pretty bad, or it used to be or something um and like obviously there is racism in NZ but it certainly nowhere near as severe as other countries, it's like Aussie and stuff like you're never going to be in Aussie and be like ohh there's an aboriginal ohh that's a bad example but like NZ is just like we're not going to discriminate against someone and be like oh you can't go here, like you're not a European.

Would you say that NZ has like more diversity in its TV like locally produced shows or like the same or not as much?

Diversity in terms of what like the people or the content

Uh the people, race specifically

Um, yeah like for sure cause in NZ you've got like your classic Europeans, and you've got your Maoris and your Islanders all that stuff. Just like you've got a wee bit of everyone, like your token Australian your token American like there's always. Obviously, well it's not obviously but I feel like anything cause in NZ the majority is European or whatever it is so there is a high probability that those people are going to be cast in things but regardless there is still a good mix. Like for example, well I don't have a good example. But like Outrageous Fortune, there's like a mix of everyone even if they are like

stereotypical cast or whatever. Like Shortland St is very diverse, and Shortland St is like the cover girl of NZ television but like yeah I feel like NZ is pretty good at keeping it chill, like I'm not going to cast someone because of how they look unless say a role is specifically for this gender or something. Like I think Shortland St had a transgender character, Blue?, Yeah I caught some of that and then like you know they're real good at that sort of jazz

Could you please comment on the BLM movement, thoughts, feelings or views about it

Yeah, like

Like what do you know about it

I don't know like a lot about it, just like the whole obviously Black Lives Matter, which they do all lives matter equally. I just want to strangle people who think that a race equals like a hierarchy or something. Cause like why would that be a thing? Oh my god. How can people think that, like its actually just like pigmentation like where you grew up. Its literally, I just can't. Like if you wanna be all evolutionary about it it's just like adaptations to best for wherever you were living obviously like Africa it was a bit better to be darker, if you're in Scotland you're going to be white like white is white. It's just it doesn't matter, its literally just it's so not related to anything other than conditions that you thrive nicely in. Like that sounds super like biological but like ohh like I just don't see how people can get pissy about it. Sorry back to BLM obviously they do matter. They don't matter more than someone else's or less than someone else's like everyone we all matter, we're all equal. No one matters more than anyone else. I don't know how you can be like, 'oh I'm better than you because I have like red hair or whatever'.

Have you seen much media coverage of the black lives matter group?

Not like a lot. Like obviously I've seen some. Like you see on Instagram and things and will have things like BLM and they're little spiel about it but like, yeah not a lot. I guess cause I only see like stuff and news and its quite like NZ centric, it's all like oh oh oh we had another earthquake, bad taste um. NZ police doing something stupid, like we rescued a hedgehog, like I love those. But yeah like I haven't seen too much about it in the news cause its quite

like NZ based, and that's obviously quite American thing like I'm more see it on social media when I'm following American people and they're talking about American topics um but yeah. In terms of news outlets and stuff not really.

Has it ever come up in a tv show that you've watched

Not that specific movement or anything

But like the idea of it?

Episodes will always touch on someone being racist and then being like you don't have a right to be racist, like I'm normal look at me we're all the same. Um I can't even name a tv show now that's done that, but they all do that. They all have their storyline about it, like someone comes and they're that racist person and they're like eugh. Then there all happy and best friends, like you're not weird after all or whatever. Like idk the whole race thing always gets touched on and like in a positive light. Like its always about people resolving their racist views. And that's always really good, it teaches people how to grow up. Overcome their very bad point of view. Like America is just honestly bad. Like it stresses me out, black civil rights all that stuff. It's just like what, like who segregates someone!? Like the whole segregation thing is just so. The south is messed up, like everywhere is messed up but idk when you learn about it in history and stuff, it's like why was this allowed. Like you can't use the same toilet as someone, like ew you're going to get your cooties on it. Oh like what's that movie, like it came out not that long ago, three women working for NASA.

Oh Hidden Figures

That was obviously like really, really good. HE's all like 'fuck the stereotypes, you can use this bathroom.' And the white woman are like eugh, and she can't use the coffee pot and stuff. And you're watching it and your just like

How is this a thing?

Yeah! Like idk that's completely off topic

No its good! Would you say that you've noticed more kinda TVs and movies that have more black people in like a starring role in recent years?

Yeah like for sure. Um yeah like Hidden Figures for example, the whole point of it was to show that black women being successful and the struggles they go through and yeah. Like the whole when they got pulled over by the policeman and they're like oh shit, this is us. And then he's like oh no I'll escort you. They're like oh alright this is unexpected. But yeah like there's definitely like more and more movies and shows that are touching on that. Was it, like I didn't watch it but was it 12 Years a Slave? I didn't watch it but didn't that genre,

I think they call them white guilt movies, cause they're meant to make white people feel guilty

Oh it does a little bit. Like I feel if I lived in America I'd be like why is this. Like yeah, I would kill to go back in time and be like what are you thinking. Cause like America is so brainwashey, like they're so like group behaviour they get their little group and then they're like I don't have an identity I'm in the group. Yeah get out their pitchforks and jump on any bandwagon they can, like not being stereotypical but because they're dumb Americans. Classic psych, like the whole ingroup-outgroup, like this is my group and we can do no wrong and then there are the others who are like eugh. It's like that in America, not like I've ever been but from me being judgemental it's just super like. Again the whole South thing, like I know not everyone in the South is like pitchforky and like I love Trump but like generic Southern states are like homophobic, racist, like stuck in their ways like they think everything is wrong, like very old fashioned. Even in terms of like dating and what not, just very old fashioned. And it's like you do you, you're entitled to do you but just stop being a twat.

Just like going back to BLM for a moment, but sticking with your old fashioned people thing, do you know of any criticisms of the BLM group?

No, I don't think I've seen enough about it to hear any. But I can imagine for example my favourite Southern states, would be like that's stupid like what are you doing like we are white, we are better. It's like bloody Hitler again, he started that trend and the Jews were white as well though, they were pretty bloody white. Okay to be fair he didn't start it, there was the whole black slavery thing a little bit earlier. But um it's just eugh, like you'd think like the whole Hitler thing people would be like eugh that's so terrible and just decide something about someone based on their race and beliefs and whatnot and like everyone is like Hitler is such a terrible person and then you're like oh but what about this you're

doing the exact same thing, well you're not killing oh well sometimes they are killing them. But like being terrible to people based on like who they are it's like when Trump was running for president or whatever um and there was some video or whatever and there was a guy talking to Trump supporters and he was reading them Hitler quotes and saying that they were Trump quotes and asking how they felt about it and the guys were like yeah, yeah yeah, I totally agree with that, go Trump and then they were like that's a Hitler quote. And they're like no its not, and then they're like so you're saying you support Hitler? And they're like I don't support Hitler, and its like well this is a Hitler quote and you agree with it. And the fact that they thought it was a Trump quote. It's just like my stupid Americans.

So that's all the questions I had, did you have anything else you wanted to add or did you have any questions

Like I guess your whole overall thing is like BLM and the media so like obviously there is a lot of that, like it does get incorporated into shows, and always like pro BLM like I don't think a show would ever be like they don't matter, they are less than us. And I think that that's quite good, in the sense that tv shows are very influential for some people. Like young people are very easily influenced, like there are those people who just like everything that someone posts, like someone goes buy this skinnytea because I'm using it and they're like I'm gonna go buy that skinnytea cause Kylie Jenner has it. So say someone cult loves a show, and then the show says Black lives don't matter then they'll be like oh that's what the show thinks. So it's good that the shows are being positive. Cause like young viewers for example

are very bandwagoney, like bloody Glee back in the day some great topics along the way. I found my Bebo the other day and it's like favourite shows Glee. And I was like oh shit. Like yeah like when I was like 13 or whatever I would have been like omg what are they saying, and I would have like eaten it all up and if they'd said one thing I would have been telling everyone, like this is what's right. Like it is obviously good that the people who are making these shows are putting in these messages. Cause older people see it as well and like exposure and yeah. Idk its good, that they are like not putting the word out there but they are like subtly, like an easy to digest way, it's not just a documentary like shoving a bunch of information down your throat its presented in like a casual ha-ha you don't know this is the meaning, but this is the meaning kind of way. It's quite good you know it'll introduce you to something without being like a lecture. So it's not really like.. which is good for our American friends.

Jessica's Interview Transcript

Bold – Interviewer Normal – Participant

Out of the three shows, what would you say is your favourite?

My favourite has to be HTGAWM mostly because I'm a huge fan of Viola Davis, I think she is so good. Also its one of the very few shows where you can't see what's going to happen. And I also happen to be a law student so it makes my life look a lot more glamorous than it is in real life, so it's something to aspire to, but not really.

So who is your favourite character and could you tell me why?

I'd have to say Wes, oh no actually, Laurel. I find Laurel really interesting, I just think she has a lot more character development than everyone else. She's kind of secretive but in ways that you haven't figured out yet she's kind of a balanced character that everyone gets along with and that no one kind of suspects anything of cause she's so quiet but also feisty at the same time. Yeah I really like that about her character

Would you say that this is the character you identify with the most?

Yeah, that's my tendency to kind of be quiet and observe before I do anything and then kind of come out and wabam

What character makes you the most frustrated or the one that you like the least out of all the shows

Um oh I forget his name, that goes to show you how much I dislike him. Uh Nate. The cop character, he just kind of gets thrown around like a little puppy dog, and then gets really angry about and then comes back. It's just really frustrating he's one of those really expendable characters that happens to stay forever.

What character if any, do you have mixed feelings about or a love/hate relationship with

Wes. Yeah I think, I've missed a few episodes I think something happens but I'm not sure. Um but no, I find that he's kind of I like how intuitive he is and how clever he is and the backstory behind his character but I don't like how confused he is all the time. Like I feel

like at least Laurel, like that's why I had to choose between Wes and Laurel, because I was like more certain that Laurel has a sort of a okay what is this bullshit and sorts through it and Wes is just like spending a lot of time on his confused face. So I'm proud of his acting, but annoyed by his character.

When did you first get introduced to the Shondaland shows

Um, I'd have to say unwittingly with Grey's Anatomy, like a few years ago, like when people were complaining about character deaths and seeing on TV2 'see what happens this Friday' ya know, but I didn't actually know it was Shonda Rhimes until Scandal, and then Scandal

was my official introduction and then ya know all worship Shonda, cause she just writes so much across like so many different character worlds. But yeah that would probably be it, Scandal.

How did you move on from Scandal to HTGAWM

Um mostly just when I heard that it came out, like on Buzzfeed you know, like true millennials. Just like guess what guys, she's done another one and I was like yaasss. And my mum pushed me into watching it as well, she was like omg lets watch this so um yeah.

So would you say that you watched HTGAWM at first because you knew Scandal was good and you thought it would be good too cause of Shonda

Yeah, yeah definitely. I think, I knew it would kind of be kind of similar but with different actors and like the nostalgia of Wes being from Harry Potter. Like it had lots of things going for it but mostly the rep that came from Scandal.

How do you watch these shows?

I watch them online. I used to, well actually my family hasn't had a television in about ten years, as in like we have had 'a' television but not access to TVNZ, even for some reason, we just never hooked it up to the actual cable or anything. So mostly we just go TVNZ online or whatever.

What website do you use to watch the show?

Um mainly couchtuner, and I recently discovered watchseries. And uh yeah those work pretty well and don't give my computer viruses or anything. Can't afford Netflix, and it wouldn't be on there anyway would it?

Uh HTGAWM is and Greys is Scandal is on the US Netflix which you use to be able to use. Nah it's a good question for me to ask cause I find all these other good streaming websites ha-ha

Yeah I both praise and curse the day my friend introduced me to couchtuner. She was watching Game of Thrones or something and I was like I can't watch GOT, it's so rude she was like and grabbed my computer and typed in couchtuner and I was like nooo like the world is opened. High school grades went down

So basically I'm just gonna list four characters from each of the TV shows and I just want you to describe them in 3-5 words.

Meredith Grey – Oh um, friendly, emotional, um dramatic she seems to be at the centre of things

Jackson Avery (shows photo) – Oh that guy, um am I supposed to talk about them emotionally or physically. I think he's probably one of the cleverer characters around in

some respects. I think I remember him kind of the emotional support for a lot of the characters in the episodes I've seen. And um just very good looking

Miranda Bailey (shows photos) – She's kind of, oh its terrible to say but she's kind of the matriarch of the group. Uh and I'd say she's the responsible one. Very powerful crying face.

Alex Karev (shows photo) – oh yep, kind of arrogant. Like arrogant but brilliant. And I think he's the one friendly, I guess, I don't remember a lot of his storylines

Olivia Pope – There we go! Um Daring, and probably um manipulative, and idk I find her actually easily distracted, crazily enough. Like she always seems to miss exactly the point which actually might reveal what's going on. Kind of like she gets distracted by other things, like Fitz.. Oh he's enemy number one.

Eli/Rowan Pope – Oh Papa Pope. Oh I don't think he's evil, I was gonna say Evil but I don't think he is so, I think I kind of respect him a little bit. Powerful, in a very visceral sense um blood thirsty, powerhungry. Hah

Fitz – annoying, annoying, annoying. To get to the reality of it. No oh I think he's um egotistical, slow, and childish

Mellie – love Mellie, also blood thirsty and powerhungry um, I think she's gritty she's kinda got that skill learned through hard knocks. And I think she's presidential, hint hint

Annelise – Um I think paradoxical uh kind of very confusing character, um I think she well she pretends at least to be matriarchal kind of supporting or figuring everyone's stuff out or guiding them or messing with them, either way she's in control.

Wes – Okay puppy dog! Um I think he's curious, and intuitive and probably mm probably, like he's a target a lot of the time. I don't know if there's a word for that. **Like he's a victim?** Yeah but not really, but nothing's happened really like oh if there was something gonna happen he's first shot, but like targetedable if that's a word

Bonnie – Oh yeah, Gilmore Girls. I think um I think she's relatable. Cause she's always trying to get along with or do well with everyone and its always one step away. I think she's an outsider, but I also think she's a the most supportive character, like she just kind of comes in and fixes stuff or moves things kind of you start to get bored and Bonnie comes along.

Connor – Which one is Connor again, [shows photograph] OH yeah that one! I feel like those were two words to describe him already. I always call him Pouty, but good to know his actual name, so yeah pouty, I think he's kind of selfish and I think he's also hmm what else do I think about him, I don't think about him often. He's kind of a user character like he'll come along and use people for any purpose like a lot of characters do that but not in a particular way were you know they're so detached or know what they're doing on some level. They'll slightly more sociopathic than him cause he knows for sure

What other television shows do you like?

Game of Thrones. And uh oh I'm trying to think of things recently, Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt, um I also like Handmaidens Tale recently a lot. But for a longer series probably uh let me think, Empire as well, and yeah those are some

Cool, who is your favourite character out of these shows

I like Lucius from Empire, I'm only thinking about things I've seen recently um I just really like that story line where he comes from nothing and then figures things out through a very basic kind of Machiavellian stepping up thing, which ties in really nicely with Scandal, and HTGAWM

Is there a character in any of those other shows that you really identify with

Oh let me think, oh yeah probably Kimmy Schmidt actually because um I was actually home- schooled growing up **I was gonna say have you been in a bunker** kind of nah, my family moved around a lot so I was home-schooled. So coming to uni and stuff like that after not having gone to high school or anything like that was a lot like her figuring things out and being very naive about things but being equally social. I think people were very shocked that I was so social but it didn't play down the naivety either.

Do your friends or family watch any or all of these shows that we've talked about so far?

Um mum a long time ago watched Grey's Anatomy, but she's a doctor so she hated it. Um we all watched HTGAWM me and mum watch Scandal, my little sister gets annoyed by it um but I think she watches Grey's Anatomy now. So most of my family does, except for my dad he just comes in and looks confused and walks right back out

Do you discuss what happens in the show with your friends or family?

Yeah mostly talk about it with my mum, especially Scandal, when interesting things happen yeah.

Do you ever discuss things that happen in the show online with strangers? Like on Facebook, twitter, reddit etc

I'm actually kind of a social media ghost, so not really. I think the closest I get is talking to people in class who watch it as well

Okay sweet um do you follow any of the actors or producers on social media?

Nope.

Did you pay much attention to what any of these actors were saying or doing during the last US election?

Yeah, I think I saw cause you know there are compilations of which celebs are supporting some people. I think I paid more attention, like I think Kerry Washington spoke quite a bit and I saw a couple of clips of that. I don't know anyone from Grey's Anatomy, or from HTGAWM what anybody else did

And what did you think or feel about what candidate Kerry Washington was supporting

I think she was supporting Hillary Clinton at the time, and I definitely agreed with that. Yeah I didn't think of any particular reasons why other than she was pro social welfare and pro yeah the good stuff

When Grey's Anatomy was created Shonda Rhimes made an effort to colour-blind cast, which means she did not write physical descriptions of any of the characters. What do you think about this?

I think that's the way to go for a lot of things. Cause unless you're talking about something to do with that particular culture where casting for a show it's important that he's African and has African values and can speak a certain dialect or something without those cultural matrix I don't think you should bring that (race) into account in a show. So I agree with that, seems like a good idea

For any show?

I think so, I can't think of a show where it would change anything

In 2014 Shonda Rhimes became the first African American showrunner ever to have a three-hour block of prime-time television scheduling on a major network. What do you think about this?

I always hate when I hear first cause its really late to be first for anything. But good for her, I mean that's really cool, I mean somebody you gotta be a fan of somebody who's good at what they do and she's probably the best at what she does in terms of night-time television so yeah. I think that's great and that they recognise her for that, it's a lot of work

Has there ever been an episode of a Shondaland show that made you rethink something or brought to your attention something that you hadn't realised before

Mm, I think there was one episode where um let me think. I think Scandal does that a lot, especially when it suddenly without you realising it, parodies current events so you kind of look at and go, oh yeah there was that journalist who was killed or something. But I think there was one episode of HTGAWM where Nate was wearing a hoody or something and they pulled him over and harassed or something like that and so I thought that was interesting, the timing of that and the choice of character that they used to bring that message across was probably made more sense cause he was a cop and so yeah I thought that was interesting

Cool. Was there/has there ever been an episode of Shondaland that has brought an emotional response

Hmm it would have to be Scandal, cause HTGAWM is so dramatic. That you are kind of like yes I can sit back from this and emotionally kind of. But Scandal, especially I think you can

let me think, ummm I think the kind of its an odd answer, but the bits with Quinn in it. Like kind of her change from this normal person to a freakdom thing. Is a bit strange and a bit sad cause I think there is lots I think it almost trivialises torture a wee bit on the show and that makes me a little bit upset. Like when they use it as a character,(coughs) when they use torture as a way to change a character then that's a little bit bothersome. And the times when Olivia is kind of all alone is very sad. Cause you it's hard to be determined and have all these plans and then things fall through, like young women growing up and trying to be really career orientated or are very ambitious, then you're like oh is that going to be

me a lot of wine, like it's nice wine but still. She always has the really good wine, and I'm like \$11 Gewürztraminer but um, but uh yeah those bits are pretty emotionally interesting

Why do you think these shows are so popular?

I think it's one of those, as pretentious as it seems one of those like close to Shakespearean stuff, that we have around. Cause you have these really, really, fallible characters who um are constantly making mistakes and constantly making the same mistakes over and over again, and I think that people think that a modern audience gets bored with that so they don't do that anymore and they move to fast and it doesn't make any sense and Shonda's characters, you see them grow through that and you see them grow through mistakes and I think that's really relatable and the drama is really interesting, *really* good acting, and in Olivia Pope's case really good clothes, such good clothes but you know I could never wear white, like not even that I'm a messy eater but I feel like it would just be tempting fate, but you gotta love that about it there is a lot going for it. And it's very timely as well, it's got a well-balanced cast representing different, ya know sexual orientations, and races and all that kind of stuff, so it's very modern by all accounts.

Do you, yourself often interact with people who come from different backgrounds?

Um not as much as I'd like. And I only say that because last year I had lots of exchange student friends and when I lived in Queenstown I met so many different kinds of people all the time. Um I don't see that as much here and now um I do in general, I have lots of friends from Europe and different places like that and like different sexual orientations I've had to learn to be you know engaged with that world which I'd never had a problem with, but it was just a lack of education completely. But like a lot of friends in college were trying everything so you have to not be phased when they give you a list of what happened last night, like you can't look really shocked you know. You have to know what you're talking about. So it's been a lot of looking things up and trying to educate myself. So yeah I am around different kinds of people now

Are these people mainly friends and acquaintances or family?

Yeap

And do you keep up with current events?

Yes I used to read the newspaper a lot and watch the news and things but kind of Trump has made me run away from that it just made me. I remember I was doing French last year and I

would look at French news everyday a bulletin of what was going on to get the French in, and I realised I was getting quite depressed what is wrong with me, like I'm not eating anything differently, and then I realised oh I've been listening to news in French and I still understand what is going on and it's not good news and I'm gonna stop doing it. So I've been avoiding it lately, but in general I'm up on what is going on

And what form do you normally do this nowadays?

Probably things like, BuzzFeed news where they give you bullet points of the news of what they know so far. That kind of thing. So like online news sites

Um and what is your favourite form of news media

Hmm when I wanna get information really fast, online. If I wanna really understand something or feel like I'm actually learning anything, then newspapers definitely still. Paper, nothing works like paper for me

What newspapers do you like to read?

The Guardian Weekly, cause it's like a compilation of a lot of different newspapers from around the world and so you can get the most, of what they, the experts, consider to be the most important thing for you to know that week. I find it easy to read and simplified and good yeah

And how do you access that?

Well you have to buy it at Whitcoulls and stuff. And it's like \$9.50 so like maybe another reason why less current events recently, like food, news, food, news

Um are there any social or political issues that you feel strongly about?

Um recently, prison welfare actually and also gender politics is pretty big for me. Yeah I just find that I've been learning a lot about human rights and stuff like that in terms of how little we afford for prisoners I think that's where you start when you go for a better society

kind of if you treat them well. And in terms of gender politics and stuff like for example the first woman to have three shows like that should just be over by now. I get a bit riled up about that, especially the we shouldn't have to pay tax for tampons, that's a good way to get me yelling.

Are you for taxing tampons?

I've been paying, like a lot of people I know don't wanna have to pay for them so they'll be free but I'm like you can get condoms for free so that's something I get interested in.

So why do you feel so strongly about these particular issues

In terms of the prison system stuff, I have a lot of friends from Europe and some of them from Denmark and places like that you know they have such a high rehabilitation rate and they don't have, when somebody commits a crime they don't have that issue again. Whereas in New Zealand your institutionalised almost from the get go, like that's it. Um doing law as well you hear about that, and criminal justice whatever, and the best criminal lawyers are always saying the biggest problem, you know, prisons, we don't want to have the same client over and over again, if not only to avoid boredom. But yeah in terms of gender stuff I think I'm a woman and my mother was a very strong force in my life, I've got a little sister um I think we are all very intelligent, educated and ambitious so it's kind of hard to see anything fighting back those character traits in the modern world. So yeah, pretty typical answer I think

So do any of the television shows that you watch reflect any of these issues in anyway?

I think um having strong female characters is a really strong theme in Shondaland shows, like she loves doing that yeah I think that it's a really good reflection of what that's like as well cause you see like especially Olivia like I said ends up alone and your kind of like this isn't fair but she keeps it just realistic enough that okay like this isn't like a cautionary tale, this is just the way it is so I find that pretty well reflected in that. Idk I just like how diverse the HTGAWM cast is. They're really interesting people, and from different backgrounds. Like Laurel is um I think a Latina or something like that so there's a lot going on there. And like I love when she speaks other languages as well that's something I love in other people, it just makes everything better. Um yeah that kind of stuff I love

Cool, so um do you think that these issues play out in other tv shows other than Shondaland?

Yeap, uh yeah definitely especially considering one of my favourites is the Handmaidens Tale I think yes. That one is highly political and beautiful to watch btw, it's very scary though.. Um I think some shows try to attack or like go for it but I think Shonda has this really amazing skill of like making it underneath the surface, where you kind of realise it in time, when the person is ready. She lets it unfold in a way that different people, especially watching it in groups of people like Scandal, people realise things at different times. Sometimes they realise it ten minutes in other people it takes two episodes to figure out what they are trying to comment on. You know that's a sign of great writing because it needs to be individualised and that's why people love it I think other shows try to attack it head on, like this week's episode is about police harassment or whatever and suddenly the whole show changes so that suddenly we have a very emotionally telling conversation between father and son or something and that's just boring, because you know you're watching a tv show and it feels like a PSA and it's kind of frustrating that's why I don't think like they handle it but they don't handle it well.

Um what kind of when you say that it's under the surface in Shondaland with the social commentary like some people realise it ten minutes in or two episodes later what kind of things are you specifically referring to there?

Uh I think the one that I was specifically referring to was the one where she kidnapped and was in what she thought was like an Iranian prison or something and when they were looking at the conditions and stuff like that one friend was like oh my gosh to think that somebody that isn't it so obvious like especially like one person noticed it the minute she was in there like oh my god like look at that it's all brown everywhere it's not clean cell and not clean water and I'm like what do you think it's like being a prisoner okay? It was really fast for one of them and then the other it took longer, it was the scene much later where her hair had changed completely cause she's known for this immaculate sense of dress and hair and always very manicured and stuff and her hair was you know dishevelled and natural and everything was going on and they went holy shit she doesn't even have a comb? I was like hmm so I was just kinda sitting there having read these articles about even NZ prisons and whatever, and they're just sitting there being absolutely shocked by this and I was like okay. But it happened at two different, very different stages for one person it was the second she walked into the room and the other much later when she

already started to settle into all the crazy, but either way the message got there. So I found that very interesting.

Do the issues that you feel strongly about influence what you choose to watch on tv?

Um I'd have to say so. I mean it really depends I guess it depends I mean like with film and stuff my favourite film is a Roman Polanski film which you know, annoys my mom but I mean it's kind of like why would you watch that Woody Allen is crazy ya know but I think you have to detach the artist from the art. And I think with television it's kind of the same, but like if I see a lot of gratuitous violence I did turn that's funny, I did turn away from Scandal for a little bit after it was revealed that Mellie was raped, cause that was just really emotionally hard I felt like it helped you understand her character a lot better but it didn't make you feel any better about it. So I think that it sometimes the social commentary is good and really powerful it can turn me off a little bit, but if its gratuitous then it just turns me off all together

But you said you like watching GOT

Yeah I knew that was gonna come through the second I said that

Yeah so how do you

How do I balance that

So like how do you compensate the violence for the entertainment factor?

Uh I'd have to say, honestly I often skip stuff if I see it coming. I can't say oh I see her on the ground and I just ignore it I kind of just skip it you know. But I think you've also gotta remember the time frame that they're working with their it would be kind of delusional to be like oh women were treated really well and always asked for consent and stuff like that. I think you can definitely tell the limit between when its necessary for the storyline and timeline versus oh the writers just are on strike. But I mean I don't approve of it a lot but I think just the everything else is just so good, that I just forget about it a little bit

So you just kind of detach yourself from or do you physically skip forward?

Physically skip forward. Like all the torture scenes and stuff I never saw those, I mean like I don't feel like I need to see all of it like I'll miss an important line I just skip, like you can usually see it coming.

Are there any social or political issues that you think are over or under played in the media in general or in tv shows

Hmm. I think that idk I think maybe one thing that is a little bit overplayed is representation of the LGBT community. Cause I've just heard from a lot of people that it's like, oh its everywhere, and it kind of breeds anger rather than just hey they're a normal part of the cast. Like in Shondaland, he's just another part of the cast, he just does his own thing it just so happens if there is a guy secretary it doesn't mean we can't get the information, we'll just use Connor its they fill a void where its normal in real life, but I think when its everywhere and especially now I've noticed that every new television show they make sure they have one or two, and just then like if enough scenes have gone by they just throw them in and like that's not how real life works. Like why are you ticking that box, cause I can tell you're just ticking that box um but probably underplayed would probably be; I don't know anything that's underplayed cause if it gets people riled up I guess people use it

Would you say the prison system is close to your heart, would you say that is under played in the media or have shows like Wentworth and OITNB have brought that more into light?

Yeah that's a good point I like OITNB uh yeah I think it brings into account. Especially that latest season where they had a lot of that. Um I think that's important that they're bringing that to light but it's still not the way that I have an issue with it, they're just, like there's a huge difference between just like showing the conditions and everything is still fine, versus like clarifying the kind of lack of rehabilitative stuff. Like you can watch OITNB and forget that they're in a prison, like I think that's where it falls short. It's really interesting, but there are moments that you forget that they're there and that is but I guess it can't all be social commentary cause I would be annoyed by that, I'm very hard to please. Oh and Broad City is another favourite.

Are there any issues you think should get more attention?

More attention, more attention, I think, um probably a lot, I think. I think probably there is a lot of coverage about kind of ISIS and that stuff going on but not in tv shows, they're kind of, they have always an almost now in terms of diversity they almost see a representation of the LGBT community the same as diversity and it's not the same you should make sure you have like one from the community and then like someone who is Muslim or is from that particular race or religion or cause I can mention a million different characters from that side of the spectrum but almost none who are non-terrorist Muslim or like non-studious Asian or something like that. So it's kind of like you've gotta pick and choose cause people only have so much attention so.

So back to the LGBT thing, do you think it's become more like tokenism rather than just like diverse well-rounded characters

Yeah exactly. Cause I think they make a character for it rather than just building a character like she did without having any idea of where they'll be from or anything like that, like that's how it should be. Um but yeah I think that's a good word, tokenism

Um and so do you think in terms of representation of Muslim characters then do you not think that there's enough?

I don't think that there's, I can't think of a lot. I mean I don't have a yeah I don't think that there's a huge issue with that I just think one of the easiest ways to get people to calm down is to have it every day. I think English television shows are probably a bit better at doing that than American or NZ or anywhere else. I think that probably should be important

Is there any issue that you think doesn't get the right kind of attention?

Um

Whether something gets played up more negatively or more positively or just not enough

Um probably, police violence. Cause when any show that I've seen addresses it it's just super dramatic and super temporary. Like oh somethings been going on we need to like reflect the world we live in and they just throw it in and the father and son have a chat or whatever. I think that's really strange because what we should be doing is having

conversations about authority. Not police. It should be extended to anything in like the executive, like how do you feel about politicians you know, like council and police and security like campus watch you know, all that stuff all at once rather than just aiming it towards one particular group, cause that's the issue. The issue is how people relate to authority what kind of authority should be spread the way it is, not people and so that I think is handled really, really, badly.

Uh what do you think of the state of race relations in the US

Ah, oh I don't think it's good, she says very eloquently. Hah ah um I think that idk I think a lot of like they think they've moved forward a lot but at the end of the day, I have heard before Olivia Pope is really clever for a black girl. I have heard that before, and I mean

From who

Well I'm originally from the States, and originally from Seattle, so but I've lived in NZ for 12 years and I haven't had to put up with any of that shit, um but I went back to see family about 5 years ago and I was in the shopping market and I heard people just talking about the show, in Kansas where my grandparents live and um you know, somewhere like that and they were just talking about it and it was just like off the cuff it wasn't like the way I said it with such emphasis it was just like woo wah, it was just you know coming from NZ or

something, it's just not even in the construct I think I was at a conference once, we were all at the dinner table, it was a youth conference thing and a couple of Aussies, were there and they went around the table like what are you, what are you and the NZer were like 'were in NZ we don't ask that like that's not how that's done. And they were like oh, okay cool and that was the end of that. And I was like well done everyone, that was beautiful, like we didn't get into blows over it, whereas in the states if you kind of said sorry but she's just smart, like she's very ambitious and good, end of story it would have just been so confused, they would be like that's what I said. You know. Idk I think it's just so embedded in some areas and its traditional in some areas that its yeah. I don't think that the new administration will help that at all. I feel like it was one of the forums in which he won, ahh but idk its used as a, what I like is now is that it's not a token thing, it's not like oh tv now has like the token black friend because you have Shonda shows now and things like that where it's just so common, like you have someone like Wes it's not like oh the black one, like you wouldn't hear that cause it's a Shonda show, it's like which one, it's

just the character it would just be whatever. I think that's something that my parents really drilled into me as a kid, especially in the states, you would say everything about that person before you said black, you'd be like oh the one with the curly hair, the one with green eyes, the one with the blue pants on everything. Um whereas I don't think people get that kind of training over there very much and it's definitely just accepted that when you drop a word or whatever about someone, so I think the administration is not good for that, they're not stopping that, they're not helping that. I think that the previous administration made people feel good about their racism, like I voted for that that's cool, now I can say whatever I want. But it's not the same as everyday practice. You know it's even worse, cause when you say oh I have a black friend or oh I have a Muslim friend don't worry it's like why, why is that relevant. Yeah idk I'm trying to be articulate about it but eugh. Ah I find it frustrating because people don't even have the tools to see themselves, being racist. Like I said these women would say these things about Olivia Pope and then not see that they hadn't said the same thing as saying oh she's clever, clever for a, they wouldn't see the difference, they don't have the means or the tools to figure that out that what I said may not have been what could be considered politically correct. Also I think that that concept of oh everything has to be politically correct now, no it just means everyone has to get along now. It's kind of important for us to for everyone to get along. Idk I think that Shonda shows help that, cause it's just people doing their people things, they're no more evil or less evil, or clever or less clever or less people. I think they should have that for everybody but they don't and people watch this show and then turn around and do their everyday lives so pfft, I don't know.

Just going back to how your mum would be like the curly haired one or the one wearing blue pants rather than saying oh the black whatever

Yeah we'd never do that

Do you think that's potentially maybe just a not wanting to say that word in particular rather than being like oh the black person cause I mean when you see a person you can see that's a black person or that's a white person or that's an Indian person so do you think it was a more that's not meant to be politically correct to say that's the Indian girl in your class or it was more a I just don't see colour

Oh yeah I see what you mean. I think it was just more of the construct that at least in our minds, that that should be the last thing you are. Um I think it would not be just because it

was politically correct I don't think we liked hearing it when other people did it that way. But it seemed to just trivialised people I think, so it was just definitely just the construct of not categorising that way. I wouldn't say it was because of politically correctness, we don't really care about that that much hahaha

And in comparison how do you think about the state of race relations in NZ

Um I think NZ is a really good place, I think NZ is really good about that in general. Um I think we're really good about that in general, I think some people, I think the only form of accepted racism in NZ is against Asian people. That I can tell you for sure. But I think that, I think actually it has been revealed to me that I think some people have issues with indigenous peoples here but not in the same way as like Australia or something. Like Australia is the only place in the world that doesn't have an official treaty with its indigenous people like IN THE WORLD. So whereas in NZ we made every attempt to, like when people do the haka it's not just because, like people are integrally connected to that sort of thing. I have heard things like oh Poku doesn't need to worry about getting into Med because he's Maori or whatever. But I'm like do you think that he would get it if he got D's and happened to be Maori, like it's because he gets A's and happens to be Maori you know. I think that's a construct but I think that's just a general thing that people always show their worse when they feel like they're being denied something they feel owed. That's always the basis of it. So I don't think that's really fair to judge everyone on what a few students say in a desperate year of their lives. But um I think yeah, but in general yeah you saw someone say that to me he'd never say that to that person or treat him differently because of that. If he got a good grade and then he got a bad grade, he might look at him a little bit funny and be like erg but based on envy rather than angry, so I think the origins are completely different than in the states. In the states there's anger not envy, it's the kind of you don't belong here rather than you have an advantage, which is still misplaced, but it's not the same. So yeah I think it's quite different.

What do you think about the BLM

Um I think it's good, I mean um idk a lot about it. I just hear what the news says about it and what shows up once in a while. I feel like it's been going on forever, as in how is this still an issue after the 1970s Olympics and the guys put their fists up and I was like wasn't that the BLM like from 50 years ago, you know. Like it should be Black Lives *Still* Matter by the way. You know. But um yeah I don't know. I think it's a little bit I really can't, I

hate talking about things I don't know and I've never experienced anything like police violence or discrimination or anything that I know of so sometimes, people say things and I just miss it completely and a friend has to tell me he said that cause you look Spanish or something and I'm like cool, alright I didn't catch that I just thought he was just an ass, but okay. Um but I do know I felt afraid when I was going through LA on my way back last year, like I felt, like I look not completely white, and I don't feel like explaining, I'm Italian to everyone don't worry I'm not Spanish or don't worry I'm not black don't worry, yeah I don't know I haven't experienced it personally on a level that a lot of people have but like I don't know. All of anything tends to be slightly misguided and oh black lives matter is like that's not the issue,

the issue is the lack of good relationship with authority figures rather than just one group. Because it's just like bullying but on a really massive scale you know. I don't know, it's a slogan that works, I guess. But I don't know if I understand the movement itself and how effective it can be

In say in like what you were just saying then how do you feel about the alternates of BLM like All lives matter or police lives matter

Police Lives Matter I disagree with cause that's just completely the opposite of BLM and I think oh I don't know, I think an appropriate slogan should be We should have figured this shit out by now you guys. Just like this is just a general, blanket statement of there is something going on but we can't quite, none of us can put our finger on exactly where it originates from. Cause I don't think it's all racism I don't think it's all authoritarianism I don't think it's all this and that I just think it's a lot about how people relate to each other so I think that if the all lives matter are trying to approach that in that way like we should just all get along you guys, then fair enough, but I don't think it means that I think it's just the opposition of well you think you're special because you're black, we're special too. No everyone is special, just because you're super doesn't mean no one else is super you know. I don't know all those movements just seem like pigeon charities, like where you send a lot of money to one place and then at home people don't have shoes or food. Like it feels good to be like BLM but then you cross the street when you see a black person, like it doesn't. Like I'd much rather not see any sticker on you and not be like and I'd much rather them not walk up to someone in the street and be like oh dude I support you. A random stranger. Like would you walk up to stranger and be like hey I don't suspect you of anything. Like thank you so much like I just. But then again you don't say that because everyone gets

offended, like I'm really trying to do something different here and why are you upset with me. So I appreciate the effort but ALM and BLM and PLM are all ridiculous, but comes from a very, very important place, so it's complicated.

Um can I just flip that though, so instead of it being Black Lives Matter or PLM or ALM if I made it Women's Lives Matter like the Women's March and Pussy Hats etc, how would you feel about that since you said gender issues are something that is close to you

Hmm that's not fair ahahah that's very clever. Yeah whatever I say does tend to flip whenever. I, I it depends. I don't see the women's march as that whole idea of feminism where its man hating I just saw that as hey there's an issue. Like I think it would be, like I think that was the actual version of All Lives Matter that I would like for race relations. It was just, it wasn't anti-men it was just for women. It just had that vibe I thought that it was just for general equality and just acknowledging a problem not against anything. It didn't feel like it was against anything um it felt kind of neutral. And the pussy hat thing was just a recognisable thing, like the BLM thing but everyone could wear them and it was just a way to establish that you were for something not against something. Idk it just feels very different.

Do you feel then that the BLM is actively against something rather than being for something

Uh yeah. I just feel like it's a more, like it doesn't feel very inclusive it feels kind of exclusive. It feels um idk I would just rather if it was more the whole authority accountable movement or something. Then somebodies mind would immediately go to yeah you have a point, because somebody has killed someone who's a child not he's a black child who may have not been killed in any other circumstance whereas with the women's march I feel like it was better, like it was a women's march and you go yeah there's a women's march because people are underpaid, because like I feel like enough people are knowledgeable about current events, even if they avoid them that if you were to ask somebody down the street why is somebody doing a women's march, they'd probably be like oh well it's really hard to be a woman, and then you have a kid and you have to go back to work in three weeks that doesn't make sense. Like they would all give you a different reason, whereas if you said why is there a BLM oh somebody got shot ae, or somebody thinks it isn't fair you know, and that's a good point too but it wouldn't be the same outcome as if you asked why

do you think we should hold authorities to accountability then somebody would give you the same answer, because somebody was shot who shouldn't have been, and it's not excluding anyone I just think it's different yeah.

Um and going back to the BLM how much media coverage or what kind of media coverage have you seen of the group

BLM? Um I think it's a very typical answer, just what you see on the news it always seems to be firebombing or fighting or rioting or something. I think the images that you did get of the women's march were much more kind of friendly and celebrities were there you know smiling and taking snapchat and that stuff, so I think it was very different news coverage which probably impacts the way I see it. Like I said I was really reluctant to comment on it because I don't know, I'm not in America and even when I was I wasn't in that space and the people I was around didn't treat me or my friends or anyone with discrimination um but that's what it looked like on tv it just looked more, exclusive rather than inclusive. So yeah that's how I think I see it.

Has the BLM ever come up in one of the TV shows that you've watched

I think there was a Scandal episode where somebody got beat up or something cause they were sitting in a lawn chair as a peaceful protest and then they got beaten up for no reason and that was about that or somebody might have died even. But that was quite direct but indirect about it, again very clever. But I was like yeah that's a good point he could just be sitting in a lawn chair and then they get a really different response to if somebody was just sitting on their lawn chair who happened to be of a different race or whatever. So yeah I did see that. I can't think of anything in HTGAWM or any other TV show. I have a feeling that one of the TV shows I watch made a joke about it but I found it to be in bad taste, but I can't remember where and I can't remember why. I just remember thinking, that's really bad taste but um and bad timing but I can't remember what.

That is all of my questions thank you so much.

Emily's Interview Transcript

Bold – Interviewer Normal – Participant

So first we'll start off by talking about tv and Shondaland, out of the three shows, what would you say would be your favourite one and could you tell me a bit about why?

Um probably, Grey's Anatomy, because there's more seasons and I've seen basically all of it except the last two seasons. And then HTGAWM I've just seen the first three I think or the first two, yeah so I've seen the first two. But I just like Grey's Anatomy better cause there's more characters

Who is your favourite character out of any of the shows?

Um probably Annalise, from HTGAWM, uh yeah

Whys that?

Um idk she's just cool, she uh knows what she wants and she's not like real timid, idk she's real cool.

So is Annalise also the character that you identify with the most or is there another character that you identify with more?

Um probably her, yeah I guess like that was like the reason I decided to do law in Dunedin. Idk I just liked those tv shows and stuff. Yeah I think so

Is there a character in any of the shows that makes you feel frustrated or one that you like the least

Um Grey's Anatomy, um Derek. I don't like him

Oh why not?

Um, idk he's just like indecisive I think, idk sort of rude, just really likes himself, idk. I just don't really like him that much.

Um is there a character that you have mixed feelings about, or like a love/hate relationship with?

Um probably, out of all the three shows? Um probably Meredith, cause she's indecisive too like. Yeah idk it's just all so dramatic, like yeah probably her. But idk cause I like her. But she's sort of dumb.

Just like annoying sometimes?

Yeah

How did you first get introduced to the Shondaland tv shows?

Um Netflix. Um idk when I was in high school, so like three years ago? Um idk I watched all Grey's Anatomy, except for like the recent stuff, from the past like two years. And then I watch HTGAWM and then I watched season one of Scandal and I really liked Greys' Anatomy. It was so good I was obsessed. And I really like HTGAWM but yeah just like on Netflix I think.

So you don't like Scandal as much or

I just couldn't get into it. Like idk I mean like it was good and it was kind of the same as HTGAWM but yeah. Idk I just like HTGAWM a lot better

Do you still just watch them online through Netflix and that sort of thing

Yeah I just watch everything on Netflix or 123movies

Yeah same one I use. So you didn't watch them on TV in the States?

Um no, just cause I wouldn't watch it at the right time. Like you know how it's always on at Tuesday at 5 or and I just would not be around Tuesday at 5 so I would just watch them online um but yeah

So the next couple of questions I've just got a list of characters and if you could describe them to me in 3 to 5 words

Meredith Grey – Um indecisive, um selfish, and um yeah just indecisive and selfish I guess **Jackson Avery** - Um, smart, um smart I don't know what else to say about him

really **Miranda Bailey** – um like in charge, caring, knows what she wants, but also like sensitive I think

Alex Karev – Um like guarded, yeah guarded I'll just say

Olivia Pope – Um oh, smart, um kind of like Annalise from the other show in a way like in charge, yeah idk

Eli Pope – Um I don't remember him really. **Yeah maybe he wasn't really in season one that's okay we'll move on**

Fitz – Um idk, I've only seen a little bit of Scandal so I only really remember Olivia Pope **No that's okay we'll just move on to HTGAWM**

Annalise Keating – Um in charge, smart, um powerful, cunning, tricky, sneaky

Wes – Um I don't know, kind of naive maybe, but obviously like really smart but not very disciplined I guess, yeah that's all I have to say

Bonnie – Gets pushed around heaps, and is like scared of other people um is definitely not like a dominate person at all

Connor – Kind of rude, um yeah just rude

What other tv shows do you like to watch?

Um I watched Shameless, that was one of my favourite shows and then House of Cards is so good. It comes out with like the next season I think it's today or tomorrow it's so good. And then yeah those are really it

Cool. Um who is your favourite character in either of those shows?

Um like Fiona from Shameless she's really, really good. And Zoe Barnes before she got killed **I only just started season 2 of House of Cards last night so I'm so glad I know she died right now haha** You would have been like what? Yeah its crazy it's so good. Such a good series

So what about those two characters do you like?

Um like so Zoe is like a real underdog, or she was and then who's the other person I said? Oh Fiona from Shameless she's just real cool. You know she's like smart, she works really hard and idk she's just cool like ya know

Cool yep and which character do you identify with the most out of those shows

Probably Fiona, um I don't know yeah she's just like a cool person, like she works really hard but likes to have fun and she doesn't really get pushed around yeah, I just think she's like so, so cool.

Do you friends or family also watch any or all of these shows?

Yeah so my mum watches House of Cards with me and I have like other friends who started watching Shameless but like we didn't really watch it at the same time so

So do you like talk about what happens in House of Cards with

Yep! Me and my mum like we used to like watch shows at the same time and then we'd like talk about it after. And I'm telling her not to watch it until I get back home for the holidays cause I go back in like two weeks, but idk if she'll wait

What about the Shondaland shows?

Um my mum watched Grey's Anatomy but she kinda got a bit tired of it, which is kinda how I felt like it dragged on and then she really, really like HTGAWM and I don't think she watched Scandal though

Do any of your friends watch any of those shows?

Um yeah they all watched Grey's Anatomy, and then HTGAWM I think a couple of them did

Do you guys talk about it or?

Um yeah, like it depends though cause the thing is with like Netflix and stuff like you're always on different seasons and it's like no one really watches it on TV so yeah sometimes

Do you ever discuss what happens in the shows with strangers online?

No but like if I watch something on TV like a finale I'll go onto twitter and search the hashtag and like read what people said, but I don't like post myself but I like read what other people say or I read like the reviews after like theories of what they'll think will happen next stuff like that.

So more like lurking than interacting?

Yeah yeah

Um do you follow any of the actors or people related to the production of the shows on social media

Yeah I follow the girl who plays Fiona on Instagram and that's it

Do you often pay attention to the things that she posts or

Um yes I saw that she was in NZ recently so yeah that's cool, so things like that but not really like majorly looking but like if it comes up

Do you ever interact with it, by liking or commenting

I'll like it but I won't comment usually

Did you pay much attention to anything she was saying during the last US election (if anything)

Um no. **Other actors or actresses in general were saying?** Um well most of them were saying that they hated Donald Trump but um yeah but like everyone was kind of saying that so it wasn't like a huge thing you know

And how did you feel about them saying they hated Donald Trump

Um yeah that's all good. I felt the same so that's cool

When Grey's Anatomy was created Shonda Rhimes made an effort to colour-blind cast, which means she did not write physical descriptions of any of the characters. What do you think about this?

I think that's cool. And yeah I guess you can kind of see that in all three of her shows. But yeah that's good

Do you think that should be carried over into other TV shows?

Um well yeah, like I don't think it should be a rule, cause I don't think it should be like you have to write this in this way cause that's just kinda stopping the creative like process, like

you should be able to write what you wanna write but yeah that's cool that she did that and I didn't know that she did that

In 2014 Shonda Rhimes became the first African American showrunner ever to have a three-hour block of prime-time television scheduling on a major network. What do you think about this?

It's really cool. I knew that HTGAWM and um Grey's Anatomy were written by her but I only just connected the dots when I saw your post that they were all written by her and I was like oh that really all makes sense now but yeah I think that's really cool

Do you think that it's a long time coming that it didn't happen until 2014

No that doesn't surprise me because like well like women couldn't vote in America until idk when it was like 19-something and then black people couldn't vote until whenever and then there's still racism and like prime-time TV wasn't a thing until idk like the 2000s anyways like when did TV come out? Like that doesn't surprise me at all, that makes sense.

Has there ever been an episode of any Shondaland show that made you rethink something or brought to your attention something that you hadn't realised or noticed before

Um that's kinda like a hard question

Um let me rephrase it, is there ever been an episode of Greys or HTGAWM that made you notice like a social issue or political issue that you hadn't

Oh yeah probably. But like I can't think of one. Like idk after every episode I'm like omg but yeah probably but idk like in all American tv shows there always like talking about politics and social issues and stuff and its always so in your face anyways so maybe.

But nothing that you can think of?

Yeah nothing that I can think of yeah sorry

That's all good. Was there ever an episode of the Shondaland shows that caused a strong emotive response in you?

Yeah I cried when Derek died, and I cried in the plane crash episode um and yeah I cried in those two episodes, they were so sad. But yeah just like real emotional, especially Grey's Anatomy cause it's a hospital show and people always die

So you cried when Derek died even though you didn't like him

Yeah it was sad he was like the main character, like they never kill the main character so it's just like random

No episode of HTGAWM that made you upset or

Um maybe, idk I've just watched so much more of Greys, cause there's so many more seasons and that's not like, like HTGAWM is like a drama like a murder show, and Grey's is just more kind of relatable in a way I guess it's more just like it's a soap basically. **So it's more like normal people in more normal situations** Yeah and then HTGAWM is probably just make me more frustrated than anything um **Whys that** just like the stuff that they did just dumb stuff, oh it's just so. Like cliff-hangers and stuff like that, but Grey's it's more like, like I said its relatable yeah

Why do you think these shows are so popular

Um idk um HTGAWM just the way that its setup like in each episode they go back and show something from that night, it's just like cool to see and then there's always like crazy stuff that happens that you wouldn't expect. Greys, um idk why it's so popular, well like I feel like it's not as popular anymore because it's like everyone is getting sick of it idk, there's just so many characters and just so much to know and in all the shows I guess it's cool like really smart um successful people, so it makes you wanna be like them in a way like, when I watched Greys I was like I'm gonna be a doctor, and I'm not gonna be a doctor. When I watched HTGAWM I'm like I'm gonna be a lawyer, and now I'm like I'm not gonna be a lawyer it's just like you just wanna be like them in a way and they like live in like nice places of the US in these beautiful homes and like idk it just makes you wanna be like them

So kind of aspirational for people in a sense?

Yeah idk they wear like cool clothes and they're wealthy and they have these mean jobs you know

So now more questions about yourself. Do you often interact with people who come from a different or diverse background to you?

Um like I guess so, but like what do you mean.

Uh like I guess like for you being kinda American kinda New Zealander and being back here like how long did you live in the US for?

So I lived there from when I was 5 to when I was 18 almost 19 so I moved back to NZ in August and I worked for like 6 months and then I came for my second year of uni here yeah so I like I guess everyone has a different background cause they grew up here and I grew up in America but like typically I hang out with white people from the North Island and like Auckland or Wellington and we all kind of grew up sort of similarly, we all live in Unicol like really I don't really hang out with people that much different to me and then people that I'm friends with in America are a lot like me

Was it quite a culture shock coming back?

Yeah like idk like, especially like the slang and stuff like the way people speak I had no idea what anyone was saying I was like what the f.. and then idk also like just like culturally like tall poppy syndrome like I really noticed that, I didn't think it was real and it so is. Like in

America you can go around to your friends and you can brag about anything and your friends will push you up and you can't do that here. Cause people say oh you really rate yourself like you really like yourself like you can't do that here. And when I learnt that really, really quickly yeah it's just like different. It's not bad or good it's just different.

So are your parents American or NZer?

New Zealand so yeah they're both from Auckland and we lived over there for my dad's work for a long time and then they decided to move back when I was in my first year of uni and yeah I just decided to have a change and come back as well

That's so interesting. So why do you think you don't interact with people that you'd consider different to yourself

Well, in Dunedin there's not a lot of people that are really different from me and then where I lived in Colorado it was also just like a wealthy white area I guess. But probably like if your saying different like mentally different from me then I just couldn't be friends with them cause I'd just be annoyed and I guess like different growing up or like racially, I just don't, I just don't really see an opportunity I guess.

So just lack of exposure

Yeah I guess, idk though. It's just I just don't

That's fair enough. Do you keep up with current events?

Um yeah less so now that I'm back in uni. But yeah I do like have the NZ Herald app and it gives me notifications and the CNN app it tells me like major breaking news. But other than that not too much.

So would you say that's the main form of how you get your news, like news apps?

Yeah like news apps or like yeah CNN and NZ Herald and if there's something major I'll google it and like click on news and read that.

Would you like 'like' those two news sites on Facebook and then see them on that as well

Ohh yeah well for like major news for like those apps but for like stupid news like little things, like those stuff.co.nz and like yeah I guess Facebook um idk though there's like a lot of fake stuff on Facebook so you don't know what's true or not.

So you just go by the wee notifications on your phone. Cool and do you watch the news on tv at all?

Yeah when I'm home I watch um, CNN or like I don't really watch NZ news as much but I watch CNN when I'm home um and like Anderson Cooper 360 and stuff like that like Megan Kelly she's really good

So what would be your preferred way to get news, tv news or news apps?

Um well I like to see it on tv I like to watch them talking about it like breaking news, but I really like reading about it on my phone and seeing what all the different sites say idk they

just have a lot of detail, like Daily Mail always has long, long articles with lots of interesting things in it and like little facts about everyone so I really like reading it on my phone I think. So probably phone.

Awesome, so are there any social or political issues that you feel strongly about?

Um yes. I would say so, um like in America or NZ?

Either or, or both

Um I think the legalisation of marijuana in NZ needs to be a thing asap because not just like recreational, but like the stuff that's being sold on the streets in NZ is really bad and the gangs own all of it, and its bad and NZ could be getting so much like revenue from it if they taxed it. And since I'm from Colorado and it was the first state to like legalise weed, I've been in that since I was a kid, and its fine and I'm not like anyone else so like I feel like it's just like that needs to be a thing and also um in America some of the new people in the political seats wanna make abortion illegal which is really bad. I think that's just like the worst thing ever it makes me so upset and you know you talk with your friends about it and stuff like um and like if someone says to me like they don't believe in abortion I'm like I can't be friends with them, which is really bad cause I should be like tolerant and like listen to other people but like that upsets me so much like I literally cannot be friends with them and I can't talk to or anything like that. And guns in America needs to be made completely illegal cause like so many people die. So guns, abortion and legalisation of marijuana in NZ

Um why do you feel strongly about these three issues

Um well I just feel like they're like common sense things um like legalisation of marijuana it's just why wouldn't you, it's such a harmless thing, it's so clear and so obvious and um these old people in government are being really stubborn and won't do anything about it and its just bad, it's just bad. You think that NZ like being a quite progressive place would do that and then they don't, and America's done it and America is like really not that progressive at all and if America can do it, why can't NZ it's just like embarrassing for NZ in a way. And then guns it's just it's like the same thing, it's like common sense. I've had friends in America who have had like they know people who have died in shootings idk if you know about the Columbine high school shooting and that happened in 1999 and I had friends who attended in the 2000s and they said they always had a memorial each year it's

just like hits so close to home cause it's like funny cause in America you get paranoid about that sort of stuff but people here you don't think about it, like you don't walk home at night your like better not get shot but like in America you're like you don't wanna piss off that person they might have a gun and then like abortion, like even if you made it illegal people would try to find a way to do it anyway so you're like putting people in danger. Like they're all common sense things to me to the way I was brought up, it's kinda like why not

So do the television shows that you watch, reflect these issues in anyway?

Um well yeah I guess. Like HTGAWM, is like murders, and guns and stuff idk I feel like I'm not saying that if they made guns illegal in America that people wouldn't die anymore, like obviously there would still be murders and stuff like that is going to happen but it's just idk yeah so there's that. Like Grey's Anatomy like abortion I guess, but idk if there have been any episodes on that,

Yeah Cristina had an abortion, way back in season two

Oh yeeha

Yeah she had an abortion with Burke and one with Owen

oh yeah did they, I don't remember what they said,

They were pretty for it I guess.

No what did Burke say and what did Owen say?

Owen was really upset and that's why they got divorced

And Burke was like okay

Yeah I think he was a little, I don't even know if he found out about it or like I think he was pretty okay with it.

Yeah I don't think it was a big thing,

And they had just got together so it was fair enough I think

yeah but it's kinda like it makes me really angry that Owen and Cristina divorced cause of that cause like yeah, it just makes me mad idk

Do the issues that you feel strongly about influence what you watch on television?

Um I guess, um like idk what other social issues are there, like I'm trying to think. Like I'm not interested in reality tv at all like I don't watch Bachelor or anything like that, I can't watch it. And I don't watch like NZ news cause I don't find it interesting enough, but I guess like HTGAWM has some current day stuff and like House of Cards is so good, and it kinda reminds me of Donald Trump in a way, so I really like watching that and then, idk Shameless have you seen that?

I've seen a couple of episodes but I've never watched it

Yeah its really good! It's kind of like, it's not like Skins it's like really good, it shows like the poverty and how people in America are so poor idk it's just cool, it's a good show. So I guess sort of what I care about influences what I watch

Would there be like a tv show that you started watching and then they had like an opposing view to you would you like stop watching it

Maybe, maybe. Idk I shouldn't say that cause I should be more open minded, but if it really frustrated me I probably wouldn't watch it, like I don't watch Fox News, like I can't watch Fox News. Like I used to watch it when Megan Kelly was on it cause she's actually really good but I just can't. It makes me mad, it makes me mad like if I have the option to turn it off and not be angry, I'll turn it off do you know what I mean. Yeah so I guess so

Are there any social or political issues that you think are over played or under played in the media?

Um

Or like in TV shows or something like that

Probably, I'm trying to think. Over played.. maybe the whole like terrorism thing? I think that a lot of right wing politicians in America take it to an extreme. And say that it's one of the biggest threats to America, and in reality it's not, it's like people with guns and people within their own country that's the real threat. I think that's really overplayed. And some

of the news anchors, idk if you know who Tomi Lahren is? **Yes** so she like always posts or goes on TV and does these rants and says like Islam is the greatest threat to America and they need to get them all out now but I don't know for sure, but I don't think that's going to make a difference, or a huge difference at least. The people that die per year that die of guns in America are people who aren't supposed to have them or toddlers accidentally shooting themselves, or their siblings or their parents um or like mentally ill people who have guns who shouldn't or um people who just one day snap and like go on a rampage and like kill their significant other like their parents, or children or siblings. Like I think that's way more of a threat than ISIS like obviously that's like a sensitive topic cause there was just this terror attack and stuff. But then there's the argument that people who are doing these terror attacks are just inspired by ISIS and they're not actually from ISIS and that's like social media as well, and like internet idk. Sort of.

So is there that you think is under played in the media?

Underplayed.

Or enough attention or the right kind of attention

Probably maybe, I'm trying to think. Um. Social issues that are underplayed in the media. Maybe you know like climate change and like the environment and stuff. Like everybody knows about it but no one really cares. Like the thing is I do care and I say that I care, but at the end of the day it's not nothing that's going to happen in my generation and I need to keep living and keep driving my car and throwing out my rubbish and I'm not going to make a huge effort to do other things like in the media they talk about it but not really. That's really underplayed. And then yeah that and yeah like environmental issues I think more of, I

mean there are heaps of documentaries about it and stuff, and like people being vegan and stuff like that but nobody really cares about it

Are there any issues that you think should get more attention? Just like climate change stuff or ?

Yeah I guess. I don't know though I don't know if it'll make a difference. There's like so many people on earth and there's no way everyone is going to become vegan or stop polluting the earth or stop driving their car there's no way. So I guess not, the media posts

like what's today and what they wanna post today and like what's going on now. I like what's posted on the media, I like reading the news with what they say so.

Now this the big, scary, heavy question, it's not really. So what do you think about the state of race relations in the US

Um I don't know. It's like well like, I'm from Boulder, Colorado and there are not very many not white people there, it's almost all white people the minority that we had were Mexicans, but they were born in the US or came over when they were like really young. At school we never hung out with them we all like hated each other, it was so bad. The Mexican people and the white people did not hang out there was no way, like there were always like a couple, but we never hung out we lived in like different parts of town but like we would never say like mean things about each other, it was just really segregated. And then idk there's like the whole BLM thing and like police shooting people which is like really, really bad. But it's hard to know what to believe also because idk there's like conflicting stories, like the police say this and then the community says this. I'm like the police is the government so what are they saying, is it true or not, idk its bad definitely. Like with Donald Trump as well it's like he wants all the immigrants out which is really scary, idk. But like all over the world there's like a huge surge of nationalism like with the French election, she didn't win, but I can't remember her name **Marine La Pen** yeah! She was kind of like the French Donald Trump. Then there's the North Korean guy, and um Putin and they all just and then the UK not wanting to let in people outside the UK. And then Australia, I don't know if you know this but Australian universities are now gonna charge Kiwi's out of country tuition which is like kind of like a bit of nationalism. They don't want kiwis going over, like I'm not gonna go over there now like there's no way, I couldn't afford it. I feel like it's not just America, I feel like a lot of places don't want other people coming in. Everyone is really nationalist so yeah.

Do you agree with that kind of sentiment about nationalism

Yes but no. So like I'm deciding who to vote for in the NZ election and I actually really like NZ First because I don't think that its fair that people from China can come in and buy all the property in NZ and like coastline and land is really bad. And NZ is such a small country and I think it's being taken advantage of. And especially for me and my family, my parents can hardly afford a home in Auckland, which is especially bad cause they were born there, I was born there how dare they not be able to live in their home town and have

to move somewhere else it's just like fucked up, like I know that's really bad. So like I sort of agree with it but not to the extent in America like I'm not a police man being like shoot that

person so but like idk it's just hard to know what to say and what to do. I agree with nationalism in NZ but I don't agree with it in America so yeah.

What do you think of the state of race relations in NZ

Um idk, um I think it's okay, idk. Idk really, I haven't been here long enough I don't think, is there social issues like with race relations in NZ?

Umm there's a little bit, but it does depend where in the country you are like Auckland where it's like the biggest population of Pacific Island people in the world is Auckland

Yeah but at the same time like there's always gonna be like it sounds so bad, but there's never gonna be like a perfect world. And like until like when like when civilisation started people were always discriminated against, and there was always racism and always someone being called out for something like I don't know. It's hard to know what's important and what's not. For someone to say, okay everyone needs to be equal and everyone needs to think this way it means that everyone needs to be equal minded and that everyone needs to be the same and that's like real communist like the same. So I feel like it's always going to be an issue, as long as humans are alive people are always there's always going to be a hierarchy of people.

Even though you've touched on it a little bit, could you talk a little bit more about BLM and how you feel about what media coverage you've seen of it

Well in Boulder we didn't really have any black people, I think maybe there were three black people at my high school and we had a 2000 people high school so um it wasn't a private high school or anything just a normal public high school, it was just the area. Um but yeah it was really bad, and there's like so many cases and like stories of these issues of like BLM and the police going after the black people. But for me it's kind of hard to like see, see it. Like I understand it and I believe them but like I've haven't had it, obviously it hasn't happened to me personally, and I don't know someone who's like I don't even have a second connection to it, or a third or a fourth I don't think. But yeah it is quite bad but

yeah I don't know how you stop it, it's just hard to know what to do. And since being in NZ that part of my brain has just turned off. I don't really, it's bad but it's also good, cause I just like when I was in America everyone would just be talking about social issues and stuff, like Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton and people here just don't care. They just don't care. Which is like good, like fair enough you don't need to care. But like in America like it's just insane, like people talk about it all the time. Like so I went back to America at the end of January, for like two weeks, and I got there the day after Donald Trump was inaugurated and um everyone was talking about it. And where I'm from its real liberal like everyone was real sad. But like things weren't that different at the same time. Like they had a women's march and stuff in Denver and um like stuff like that. But everyone was just like sad and like talking about it and stuff, idk and then I went back in March and things weren't different at all. They just were not different. I don't know, and I realise that I'm contradicting myself, but things are different but they're not. Idk for me personally in America things aren't different cause I live in, like I'm from this wealthy area and people like me, and we're not really targeted so it doesn't personally affect me, but I know it does affect other people,

So personally, no change, but bigger picture?

Yeah and it's hard to know what to do. Cause everyone is selfish so it's just like do I leave it or do I like do something, but will it change my life, like what's the benefit for me

Has the BLM ever come up in any of the TV shows that you watched?

Yeah! I guess so, I'm trying to think. House of Cards it doesn't really, but that's just a political show, there's Shameless, but they're from like Chicago and there's different types of people anyways. I was watching something the other night, what was it. Oh there's that movie that's come out called Get Out, have you seen it? **Yeah it's so good** Yeah like so I was facetimeing my friend in America and she was like I just saw Get Out, and I was like what's Get Out she's like how do you not know, cause I hadn't heard of it cause I was here, she's like what the heck, you move to NZ and not keep up with current events anymore? And I was like well it doesn't affect me anymore sorry, I don't have to worry about it. But yeah, what was I saying. **Just about Get Out I guess?** But yeah I don't really keep up with those TV shows I guess. I'm sure it does come up in TV shows, **you just don't notice it?** Yeah or I just don't care as much idk and cause also it's just a TV show

Cool that's all I had.

Samantha's Interview Transcript

Bold – Interviewer Normal- Participant

First question, what kind of television shows do you like?

Ooh um. I like comedies, um let's see um and some dramedies like drama and comedy mixes but those would be my two go to.

Yeah what shows in particular?

Um let's see. Uh I like Arrested Development, I like Portlandia, I like um I feel like I need to go on my Netflix and see what I've been watching recently. I like yeah I feel like I actually have to do that is that okay?

Yeah go for gold.

Cause I feel like I'm forgetting some. Um I like Archer and Bob's Burgers um, Parks and Recreation, the Office, uh I like Orange is the New Black and I watched a little bit of House of Cards, but I am not caught up on that. And I really like the show Narcos which is a little bit different for me because it's not comedy based. But that's a really good show.

Fabulous. And do you normally just watch tv online or do you actually watch tv on tv still?

Uh I watch it online almost exclusively.

Yeah me too. Do you watch it just on your laptop or connect it to a bigger screen

Uh both! When I have access to a bigger screen I'll connect it to a bigger screen but there's been a lot watched on my laptop as well

When in the day do you watch tv?

Say at night. Like before bed.

So with your favourite tv shows, what is it about them that you like?

Uh I like witty humour, and kind of like odd comedy I think.

Is there a particular character that you really like in one of your favourite tv shows?

Oh hmm. I think I really like Leslie Knope from Parks and Rec because now that I've done more like policy things and have worked with local government and kind of seeing her struggle and why that character is even more funny to me now and more relatable I think she's played well as a strong female character as well.

Yep cool. Is there a particular character in any of the shows you like that you really dislike or love to hate

Oh love to hate hmm. I feel like I have to go back and look at shows to figure it out. Hmm I would say probably, even though I haven't watched all of it, from what I've seen of House of Cards, the main character, Frank Underwood. You kind of, there's always this sense of wanting to root for him and then realising no he's a terrible human being and you shouldn't even like him at all but you kind of do.

I feel that. Um do your friends or family watch any of the same tv shows as you?

Uh yes some of them.

Do you talk about what happens in the shows with them or?

Uh yes I think that the only one that I talk with my family about out of the ones that I've mentioned is Parks and Recreation because they've seen that too. Um I think they tend to watch more things directly on TV and less online so we don't tend to have the same overlap of shows. But with friends my age, we've definitely talked about The Office and Parks and Recreation and Arrested Development

Do you ever discuss what happens on shows online with strangers or on social media sites like Facebook, twitter, reddit?

Um I don't think that I use social media like that. I know it's probably a little bit not typical for millennials but I don't post that much and I don't do anything on my twitter but I think that if I was to meet someone at a party or something and strike up a conversation about these shows and they were a stranger then I would. More in person than online for me

Fair. Do you follow any of the actors or producers of your favourite tv shows on social media?

Um I don't think so

Do you follow any celebrities on social media or anything like that?

No I really don't.

Um have you ever heard of the shows GA, Scandal or HTGAWM?

I've heard of all three yes

Fabulous. Have you ever watched an episode of any of these shows?

I have. It was like one episode of Grey's Anatomy, maybe four or five years ago and then I sat down with my roommate from California recently and she was watching an episode of Scandal so I've seen an episode of each but that's it.

What did you think about what you saw?

Um I found that Grey's Anatomy, kinda felt like um kind of like a soap opera. I think, come to think of it Scandal did too. But they were really like I could feel that they were really engaging and entertaining. It just didn't catch my attention really.

So why did it not catch your attention personally?

Um that's a good question. I think that maybe it was lacking some of the comedic things that I look for. Um so it was more dramatic and less comedic and it didn't hold my attention that way

From what you've seen or heard about all or any of these shows do you think you could describe to me what you think each one is about?

Uh Grey's Anatomy I think that it's about a group of doctors um in a hospital setting I think in Washington or somewhere in the Pacific North West and they I know some people are in relationships like the doctors and there's different patients that they take care of and there's drama with the medical side and the relationship side. And then HTGAWM I really don't know much about. I would assume it's about how to get away with murder but that's

truly all I know and um Scandal I know a little bit more about because my roommate talks about it. So I know it's more about the President of the United States and um like the people who are kind of close to him in the administration and like affairs and stuff like that but I think that's all I know

That's pretty good, better than most people. When Grey's Anatomy was created Shonda Rhimes made an effort to colour-blind cast, which means she did not write physical descriptions of any of the characters. What do you think about this?

I think that's great I think it should be done that way all the time. I think people get caught up the fact that people want to view certain ethnicities on screen and if they aren't the best fit for those characters then it should be based on peoples acting performances.

In 2014 Shonda Rhimes became the first African American showrunner ever to have a three-hour block of prime-time television scheduling on a major network. What do you think about this?

Wow. I think that that's pretty amazing and a little sad that that hadn't happened yet. That that was the first time. But awesome that she's created this little empire of being able to be like these shows, I don't know I would assume that most ethnicities enjoy not just you know just white people or just black people yeah.

Do you or have you ever watched a tv show that has a diverse cast or a cast of mainly non- white characters?

Um mainly non-white characters. Oh I really like the show Master of None, for that. And I don't think, I mean if you were to count everybody it would not be a majority of white people. I love that show. I mean that's the first one that came to mind, I'd have to dig a little deeper to find other ones

Do you often interact with people that come from a different or diverse background to you?

Um I try to it's a little bit tricky, I find that the neighbourhood where I grew up is mostly white people and the school that I went to is very diverse in California but my program and the people I spent the most time with it was 7 Caucasian and one Asian so it was again mostly white people.

So just out of what you've got offered to you basically ?

Yeah I think I find myself usually around more Caucasian people than anybody else. But I try to make an effort to like expand that a bit, because I know. Like I feel like I've found out its better to diversify your friend group too

Do you keep up with current events?

Yes I would say that I do

What way do you do this? Through tv news, newspaper, online news?

Uh yeah like political comedy shows, a lot of those, a lot of reading articles online and like online. Like reading articles and then like the online videos usually giving the same information from different news sources and yeah I think that's how I do it

And what would be your favourite form of getting news?

I think it's tricky because there's a big bias. But I like the political satire shows and the comedy shows because I think that they do a really good job of illuminating things in a different way and kind of cutting through the BS that sometime the mainstream media still has

And what would be your favourite one of those kinds of shows

Ooh I really like uh Full Frontal with Samantha B and uh The Daily Show

And of like online news site that you read news on what would be your preferred one or the one you read the most

That's tricky um I do read a little bit of things on like CNN but I think I prefer like trying to think of, hang on I'll look on my phone to see cause they're all open, I don't really pay much attention to the source as much as I should. I guess its Buzzfeed news and Vox

And what social or political issues do you feel the most strongly about?

Uh human rights and human equality, climate change um and uh I would say that, uh because of the way that I've studied things I think that those can reach out into a lot of different issues so I'd say that those are the two main ones.

And what is it about these issues that make them important or significant to you

Well I think that I have, like it influences my life because of what I've studied and who I am. And it also influences the people who are around me that I care about

So when you say human rights issues like what in particular?

Hmm um gay rights issues, um issues with um I think like um social construct of racism in America as well as I think more on the climate change side of things like denialism and trying to move policy in America forward

Is that a little bit difficult at the moment?

Yeah.

Do the television shows that you watch reflect any of these issues in any way?

Um I think some of them do. Both directly and indirectly. I think Master of None does a good job of social justice issues pretty directly. I think that some of the more comedic ones I don't know they might hit it but not directly

Do the issues that you feel strongly about influence what you choose to watch on television?

I think they've started to. I think I've looked back at some of the things I used to enjoy and now I identify that there's a lot of sexism in them or racist undertones and I'm like ohh I'm not really into that anymore you know. Just being more educated has let me see what I watch differently

Cool um are there any social or political issues that you think are over played or under played in the media?

Um over played or underplayed. That's tricky. I think that most social issues need more attention but like the right kind of attention and I think that um I think that that's sometimes the issue rather than just being talked about, but being talked about in the right ways that doesn't alienate people if they don't agree and can like start a conversation rather than shut it down right away

Would you have any specifics on that?

Uh so this was in the news in general? – **yep** - I'd say that a lot of the time the issues become too politicised especially in America with a two party system and its just your either in one boat or the other and if the people that you believe are good representations of your ideals and they're firmly in one camp or another then you're likely going to follow that so I think that sometimes issues that are sometimes more moral, become very political and

that's just not the right way to be showing them. Everything from gay rights to um human rights in general, sexism, racism and climate change yeah

Cool are there any issues that you think are overplayed then? In like the opposite

Overplayed. Um it's just based on my own political view though. I think that there's too much emphasis in America on false senses of like danger like terrorists action or immigrant population that are being perceived as dangerous I think that there's too much emphasis on being afraid and putting fear in people.

Um why do you reckon that it is overplayed the whole terrorist danger thing?

Cause I think that there's control in that. I think if you get enough people scared enough they'll be more willing to follow you. I think there's power in that

Um are there any issues that should get more attention, or at this moment in time desperately need more attention or the right kind of attention?

I think that I'll just go back to climate change on that one, because time is very much of the essence and its, its it could be a catastrophe and that doesn't just effect Americans it affects everyone especially people who mostly don't live in very wealthy country. So it makes it hard

What do you feel about Trump pulling out of the Paris Agreement?

Ohm I think it's a silly decision I think that it puts the US at a disadvantage um you're not at the negotiating table anymore. You have even coal companies begging you to stay in it because it would be better for them for planning ahead, they're thinking forward and you're trying to pull everything back and despite the fact that its voluntary and under Trump we wouldn't have made huge cuts in emissions anyway ah I think that being in the

negotiating table and you know having consensus with so many different nations is really important and taking that away was just a really terrible idea

In terms of going back do you think Trump will go back on other things as well? Like

Like he's pushing America in the wrong direction or like backward?

Yeah on like social issues

Yes definitely I think that pretty much every single social issue that I find important, he has a different view than me which is difficult because he has the power with congress and the senate to actually make those things happen

This is my big scary question but not really. What do you think about the state of race relations in the US at this moment?

I think that there is a lot of tension, I think that having a president in charge who puts on a mask that says you know, I love everyone and then simultaneously his actions show something quite different makes it really hard and despite everything wasn't better or perfect under Obama but I think having a strong leader in the White House who cared about those issues made a difference and I think that there's a lot of work that can be done and a lot of improvement in race relations in America but I don't know if that can happen in the next four years.

Um so do you think that because the Republicans have the Presidency, the Congress and the Senate that it's just going to go to a complete standstill?

No I think that like what happened with a lot of other things that when the President or the federal government takes a step back in certain issues I think that grass-root really local organisations step up but I think that there's always going to be parts of the country where there is just not as much um not as many grass-root efforts and where more of a national tone of equality and equal rights would be helpful. I think that not all hope is lost but it doesn't reflect well on our nation as a whole when our President is kind of our face to the world and yeah

Um and on the converse of that what do you think about the state of race relations in NZ

That's hard because I feel pretty removed from it but um I would say kind of the sense that I got when I was there is that there is still some tension between Maori and white NZers I think that there's still a little bit of like this idea I don't know I think it was compared once to me as like the problem with our Native Americans in America there was just this tone about it that it was just a little tense

What do you think about the BLM

I think that it gets a lot of negative press when it doesn't deserve to. I think that people don't truly understand the message behind it they're not saying that only black lives matter, they're saying that (sighs) black lives matter enough that everybody should take care and act accordingly because there is a lot of discrimination and most other ethnicities don't have to face that so I think that some people are threatened by this idea that black lives matter when they think that all lives matter but their actions don't even um what's the word I'm looking for, show that I think they're actions often don't even though they say all lives matter that's not what they mean

What do you think about that All Lives Matter movement or hashtag at least came through

I think that uh that some people have the right intention, but I don't think they get that there's this disconnect between what they are trying to say and what America is actually like for people of colour

What kind of media coverage or how much media coverage have you seen of BLM

Um I think it's usually mostly covered in the comedy satire news shows that I watch. But I because I don't watch news on tv I'm not sure how much I don't think that like the local news covers it that much to be honest

And what about like with police shootings, have you ever been near enough to not experience one but like near enough to a situation

Um hmm no I don't think I've ever been in a location that's been particularly close. I remember especially the one that was geographically closest to Colorado at the time, I think it was in Texas, it got a lot of coverage. It happens even further east and more often in the south too but I think the one I saw the most coverage on like tv was in Texas

Yip cool has the BLM group or a movement that's like emulating them ever come up in any of your favourite tv shows

I wanna say yeah, but I just don't remember which one.

Was it a positive portrayal or negative portrayal?

It was a positive portrayal yeah

That's about all the questions I've got. Yay did you have anything else to add?

No I'll be excited to see what this all turns into

Matt's Interview Transcript

Bold – Interviewer Normal – Participant

So what kind of television shows do you like to watch?

I usually have like one drama and one comedy going at a time so like some of my favourites right now I watch are Breaking Bad I watch Game of Thrones but then we just finished Scrubs I watched all of like How I Met Your Mother. So I usually have like a drama and a comedy going so

So usually something older like Scrubs or Breaking Bad or more current stuff?

Um a little bit of both. Like Breaking Bad was pretty recent, I watched it when it was live so I do usually have a couple of shows live but then older too, like I'm watching The Wire right now. I dabble in a little bit of both

How do you watch tv like online or on actual tv?

Yeah I don't watch a lot of live tv shows I don't watch a lot of cable, its mostly like Netflix, Hulu and all that stuff the only show I watch mainly right now is Game of Thrones live

For the other tv shows do you watch them on a laptop? Or do you hook your laptop up to a bigger screen?

Uh we have, I have a PS4 which has Netflix on it which is plugged into the tv so we watch it through that

And when do you usually watch tv?

Um usually before and after work, like in the morning sometimes when I'm eating breakfast and after work with Danny, sometimes we'll watch tv as we're eating dinner.

Yep so around meal times as something else to do

Exactly

So what do you usually watch at breakfast? Are you more likely to watch a comedy or a drama?

Yeah I don't know, like at breakfast right now I've been watching The Wire, like half an episode in the morning. Then at night it kinda depends on the mood. Sometimes we're like lets watch something more serious sometimes we'll watch a comedy. Usually we tend to do comedy at night

And do you watch tv by yourself as well? Like after dinner?

Yeah yeah. I mean The Wire I'm watching by myself. Like Danny and I watch a couple of shows together we usually we have one or two we watch together but we each have our own shows too.

Cool. What would be your favourite tv show of all time?

Oh man. That's tough. Uh all time. I think its honestly between Breaking Bad and Game of Thrones, it's a toss up but Lost is also up there. I'd say if I had to choose, probably Breaking Bad.

Nice. So Game of Thrones would be your current on the air tv show then?

Yes

And what is it about these two shows that you like

I, so Breaking Bad I like because its very the hero is very anti-hero so it's very different. So that half of the story was super interesting and I found the characters, not even just Walt I found all of the characters really deep and had interesting pasts, and that's what I really liked about that. And then GOT I think is just you know, the volatility of it, right that's what everyone talks about. You never know what's going to happen each week and that's so fun

Is there a particular character in any of these shows that you really, really like and could you tell me a little bit about that?

Sure, um in BB I really enjoyed Jesse, because Jesse has the most growth as a character. In the beginning he's like this street rat like just like you know he does all this crazy stuff and

then by the end he's grown as a person, and yeah he's still getting in trouble and stuff but he's like grown in his way and I think he's in a much better mental place which was really fun to watch and then yeah GOT I don't know I like Arya she's just badass she's like does her own thing

Is there a particular character in these tv shows that you really dislike or love to hate

Uh yeah in GOT it was Ramsay for a while, RIP. Uh I guess Cersei is like the classic like everybody just doesn't like her cause she's like super selfish and always interested in her own game and never interested in anybody else. She's super easy to hate um I don't know about Breaking Bad if I ever hated anybody, cause even the villains in that, like that's what I loved about it the villains like Gus Spring was like super interesting, like you don't hate him because he's like a business man you know what I mean, he's a savage but he's a businessman so that's why I liked the show so much

Just because the characters are so three-dimensional?

Yeah it's like there's no altruistic hero or altruistic villain they're all involved in drugs so there is no one true altruistic person where everyone is meant to like this guy. Like a good example in Lost is like Jack, everybody is supposed to like Jack you know he's a doctor and he's stuck on the island

Is there a particular character in any of these tv shows that you identify with the most ?

That I identify with. Hmm let's see. In GOT I think I probably identify with Sam the most, Sam Tarly, because he's super book nerdish and gets really intense on like one thing for a while cause sometimes I'll find myself doing that like I find something that I'm passionate about and get into it for a long, long time and get into it to help people out by doing stuff like that. So definitely I think I'm super interested probably more than most people in his character path and his actions as a character so I like Sam a lot.

Awesome um do your friends or family watch any of the same tv shows as you?

Uh so I have two younger sisters and um they do I would say. They watch very similar shows, like we all like The Office, we I think one of them definitely watched all of Lost and all of Breaking Bad. I think they're a little young for GOT they were like, like one of

them just turned 21 but she kind of missed the boat and the other one is only like in high school so she's a little young for it. But we generally have similar tastes I would say. I mean we like Parks and Rec and stuff like that. But my parents not so much.

Do you often talk about the tv shows with your family, that you've watched together or watched the same?

Yeah um it was more so when we were growing up when we were all under the same roof. But I live on my own now and other sisters in college it's hard to. I would say that when we were watching BB live and my sister and I both watched it we would always have talk backs and talk about it and things like that

Do you ever discuss what happens in tv shows online with strangers? Like of twitter, Facebook or reddit?

Uh yeah Reddit and sometimes I'll check on GOT forums in post-episode discussions, I don't contribute all that much but I'll do a lot of reading, but sometimes I'll comment. But yeah through reddit mostly

Cool. Um do you follow any of the actors or producers of those shows on social media?

Ah I follow Aaron Paul cause I think he's funny and I like him on Bojack Horseman too. Um so I like Aaron Paul a lot and he has cool photos and stuff so I like Aaron Paul, I don't think any GOT people

That's all good. Do you often pay attention to the things that Aaron Paul posts?

Uh I wouldn't say I could tell you what he's doing on a daily basis but I don't know. I guess I like check in, but I wouldn't say I'm like actively invested I'm just not the kind of person who's super invested in celebrities

So it's just like you're scrolling through and it's like oh Aaron Pauls posted something, cool, scroll on?

Yeah exactly. I also think I once saw Aaron Paul (**Inhales excitedly**) I know! I was walking down the street in Boston and I swear to you it was him and nobody believes me

but I'm 100% sure I saw him. I freaked out and didn't know what to do so I just kept walking

Nice I'd probably do the same if I saw someone who I really rated

Yeah we were also in a cross-walk on Mass Ave which is a very busy road in Boston so I'm not going to stop him and be like are you Aaron Paul there.

Yeah yeah that's fair. Um so do you ever interact with his social media by commenting, liking or retweeting?

No, I'm not super active in general on social media so I would say definitely not

That's all good. Um did you pay much attention to what he was saying during the last US election if he was saying anything

Um I don't know if I was paying attention to him because I don't think he was super vocal about it. But there are some people that I follow that I do like care about what they think about

Yeah what people?

Um there are some people on twitter that I follow that, like certain news stations and like that and analysis stuff like that. But ah I follow like a youtube channel that sort of does like short recap videos of like major news and stuff like that. That's uh yeah I do that as well, like during the election of course.

Yep no awesome. So uh what news channels were you following and did you agree with what they were saying

Um I follow mostly CNN and New York Times. I would say New York Times is the main one that I follow um I don't believe that the media is perfect but I try the best I can to filter it and take everything that is reported with a grain of salt. Like I don't think that just because they agree with my personal views they are perfect and I should take everything they say as true. But I just try to make my own opinions based of facts and things they have discovered, and reports are released and things like that I would say.

Yep cool. Um so have you ever heard of the television shows GA, Scandal and HTGAWM?

So I have heard of them obviously. I know generally what. Actually HTGAWM I don't know what it's about, I know what GA is about and I know what Scandal is about I think.

Have you ever watched an episode of these shows? Or even a bit of an episode?

I think I've watched a little bit of GA I think I was forced to by an ex, but I didn't enjoy it at all.

Haha fair enough. Why did you not enjoy it?

Ah I think that it is a little over dramatised. It feels soap opera-ey I don't like soap opera type shows that much. It just wasn't for me

Just wasn't for you. That's alright and why do you think you've never watched an episode of Scandal or HTGAWM?

Uh I don't know. I mean I've heard good things about it. It's just one of those shows that's like I have a bunch of those shows that I just haven't gotten around to I guess. Like I probably would watch it but there's just shows that are higher up on my list I guess. But probably would get around to it

So like grittier shows like The Wire would you say that's more your cup of tea?

I think so yeah. I don't know I think I tend to go for stuff that's a little more intensive or more, more comedy based

Like both ends of the spectrum? Really intense or really light-hearted?

Exactly!

From what you've heard or know of any or all of the shows, do you think you could describe to me what you think each one is about?

Oh no. I think I could describe what GA is about but the other two I really don't know anything about. I know it's got good reviews but I couldn't tell you anything about them. But I know GA is about a hospital and there are inter-relationships with people in the

hospital which is super like soap opera-ey, but apparently its very good, but I don't know just didn't peak my interest

That's alright. What about Scandal what do you think that's about?

To be honest I really don't know anything about it. All I know is that I have a couple of, so I went to BU [Boston University] and we have a couple of people that were in like TV and film that we are friends with and they like tweet about it all the time like such and such actress on there is so good and like doesn't get any credit and like all this stuff. So I follow them on twitter and stuff so I just see them posting about it, especially Scandal and I really don't know anything about HTGAWM

That's all good um so I've got some fun facts about these shows and I'll just ask you what you think about them

Okay sure.

So when Grey's Anatomy was created Shonda Rhimes made an effort to colour-blind cast, which means she did not write physical descriptions of any of the characters. What do you think about this?

I think yeah, I think that's awesome. It's exactly how we should be doing things. It shouldn't be like, it just reminds me of um do you know Aziz Ansari's show, um Master of None, he does a great episode where he speaks about how Indian people are always type cast as like the cab driver or you know the 7/11 guy and you know that's it. You know what I mean? Like I hate that. It just you know what I mean? It just shouldn't be a prerequisite to getting a role. Like if you are right for the role, you're right for the role so I think that's awesome

And in 2014 Shonda Rhimes became the first African American showrunner ever to have a three-hour block of prime-time television scheduling on a major network. What do you think about this?

Wow I mean that's awesome. I didn't know that she was the creator of all three shows. Uh that's really wow, I mean good on her, that's awesome that she's that creative and she has such different, cause I know they're very different shows so. I mean that's an incredible

achievement for her especially as an African American woman its awesome to see her succeed so that's great.

What do you think about the fact that it took until 2014 for that to happen?

Well I mean, you know. I mean it's obviously frustrating but I think there are some aspects of TV that are really going in the right direction but obviously you know it's still feels like baby steps, it still feels like we're crawling. Um but it is, like it is good to see like major, major networks and major, major movies, Star Wars casting John Boyega as a storm trooper I mean that's awesome. We need more stuff like that.

That's awesome yay. Um do you or have you ever watched a tv show that has a diverse cast or a cast of mainly non-white characters

Um yeah, The Wire is actually a really good example. I don't know if you've ever watched it but like it, oh and I watched Atlanta recently which is, if you haven't seen it its phenomenal, Childish Gambino or Donald Glover I guess his show, and it's basically a whole black cast I think there's maybe one white person. But it's generally or black people. And then of course The Wire is very, very diverse

Yeah, yeah The Wire is already in my thesis haha

I love it, now let me just say I'm only in Season Three so

That's okay I've only watched one episode of it but I was like I'll just read about it; it'll be fine

Oh if you get the chance you should definitely watch it

Um do you often interact with people who come from a different or diverse background to you?

Yes so actually I do. I didn't when I was growing up because I'm from New Hampshire and it's just like 97% white people but then I decided that I don't wanna do that I wanted to move to a city so I went to BU with USMF and I got heavily involved in the theatre community over there and I you know people from BU come from all sorts of backgrounds and even to this day I just did a community theatre show where we had people from all

over the place and all sorts of backgrounds so definitely I would say I try as hard as I can to diversify my friend groups because I think it's important.

Nice I like that. Um so these people are acquaintances that become friends?

Yeah I mean obviously when you do a show you don't know everyone from the onset, so you become friends with people over the course of the show and it's great and I still keep in touch with them

And why do you think it's important to have like a diverse friend group?

Well I think if you don't have a diverse friend group then you are going to base your world view on a very narrow spectrum. If you don't get to know people who come from different backgrounds and have different experiences then you're going to base your views on very narrow-minded, you're only going to view things through that lens and if you don't at least open yourself up to and expose yourself to other types of viewpoints and other experiences it's going to be hard for you to have well informed opinions, in my opinion. That's how I believe it

Nice, Um do you keep up with current events?

Yes

And in what way do you do this? TV news, newspapers, online news sites, social media?

Sure. Um as I said, I mentioned I follow a couple of news sites on twitter I try to read the major news stories. I also listen to a podcast called the Daily by the New York Times every single day before I go to work which just in about 20 minutes summarises the main happenings usually recently it's been about the White House because it feels like all the news is about the White House, cause that's the reality we live in. You know, they do, do, what I like about it is that half of the show they spend on other events, world events. The other day they had a French election episode and yeah

And what would be your favourite form of news media? Like your favourite way to consume it?

Yeah I think the podcast is great because its short and it sort of summarises things and it's like a nice way to past the time and I get like the general consensus on big events that I know are happening and then if I want to do further research and find out what really happened I can go online and read full articles on different websites or whatever. But I like it

because it quickly summarises it and it gives me something to do to pass the time and I don't have to waste time by scrolling and things like that

So are CNN and the New York Times your favourite news sites or news organisations?

Uh yeah I generally, like I said I also follow RPolitics on reddit which posts a whole bunch of different sites and based on the headlines I'll read different articles from different sites and things like that

What kind of headlines draw you in, like what events do you like to read about or interest you?

Well I think as a as an American who is eligible to vote it's important to stay in touch with how the White House is handling things and like I mentioned it's pretty much impossible these days to not see news about the White House and what Trump is doing and the White House and all this stuff so I try and keep in touch with that, as well as other world elections I try to at least follow along with how things are going along in other countries and like major news in other countries, uh yeah I mean I think that's probably about it.

Yeah cool, uh so just the kind of general state of the world so you can feel it out

Yeah I try to I would say it's more US based but I try to at least have some idea of what's going on in those major countries so yeah.

Nice and what social or political issues do you feel the most strongly about?

Um I would say probably, probably social and social rights I would feel the most strong about. I think that I don't have enough experience in economy to fully form an opinion yet. So I've just started my first job and I've only been in my job for a year um I have general views about the economy, but I feel like I don't have enough education to know and experience to know about that. But I would say that my views on uh social rights and

human rights are very liberal and I'm very passionate about it and I'll stand up in front of people I have no problem defending it

And social or like civil rights ?

Uh especially LGBT uh community stuff cause as I mentioned I'm a part of a lot of theatre communities, and while I'm not LGBT person I have a ton of friends who are and people who I care a lot about so it's really important to me that their voice is heard and they have their rights as people because they're just normal people. At least in my opinion

No definitely. So what makes these issues important to you?

Like I said, it mostly stems from my background and my exposure to these people on an almost a daily basis. And my own experiences have shaped how I view them as normal people and some of my closest friends um you know it's just something that I care a lot about based on those relationships that I have.

Lovely. Are there any, oh wait where am I up to. Do the television shows that you watch reflect any of these issues in anyway?

Um yeah The Wire actually. Always come back to The Wire. There's a one of the gangsters in the show, oh gangsters that makes me sound so awful, but one of the main characters on the drug side of things I should say is named Omar and he's like openly gay and there are multiple like sex scenes and thing like that I think that's great. I wouldn't say I watch a ton of shows that are based in that, but when it's on there I will always support that. Like I said there are a couple of shows that have gay characters and things like that and I think that's awesome. Master of None, the best friend uh I think her name is Diane or Debbie **Oh yeah I know the one you mean** yeah she's a lesbian so yeah. That's awesome

Do the issues that you feel strongly about influence what you choose to watch on tv?

Yeah I mean I think I would feel uncomfortable watching a show that are blatantly, unless they are doing a study on how things used to be or like some sort of concept around how it effects people socially, I wouldn't feel comfortable watching a show that didn't at least respect some of the views that I have. That's not to say I wouldn't at least give it a chance, like I like to think diversifying my opinion on things is important but generally if it doesn't

agree with, if there are things in it that make me feel uncomfortable in terms of my social standing and views on human rights then I probably wouldn't watch it.

Yeah that's fair. Are there any social or political issues that you think are over played or underplayed in the media?

Ooh that's a big question,

Take your time it's okay

Yeah just give me a second. Well I feel that uh religion, this is gonna get down into it a little bit, but I think that it is a little bit too on some sides of the media and some sites especially on some ends it gets a little bit dicey for me, because it was supposed to be a separation of church and state and it seems that some politic policies are now being based on uh a certain religious, like the one that just came out on the transgender things, and it feels like that's based in religion and not really based in this bullshit reasoning, excuse my language, like it's really based in his nonsensical reasoning about medical costs and I think it used as a scapegoat and used as an excuse to have bigotry type views um I would say, again I don't wanna say that religion is all bad. I just think that it's played up and used as an excuse or an escape route on a lot of sides of viewpoints.

Like the baker that's going to the Supreme Court cause he doesn't wanna bake cakes for gay weddings

Yep perfect example. Like it really is. Its so I get it to a degree, because religion freedom is also a law in this country but you know if it's going to be, like believe what you want to

believe that's fine, but if its causing discomfort and harm and discrimination against another person then I can't get behind that, I just can't do it.

Yeah fair. Um so are there any issues that you think are underplayed then?

Um I think that poverty is very underplayed. I think the massive economic inequality is not talked about enough and I think that people focus on all these other issues like health care and all this stuff and healthcare is important so I shouldn't say its overplayed, I think its discussed enough, but there's not enough discussion on poverty which has kind of stayed stable and not changed all that much, over the last, even through all the organisations in my lifetime, or administrations I should say. It seems like it's pretty stagnant and it's not

really changing because there still seems to be this huge class gap and it's not middling out enough in my opinion.

Haha I feel ya. Are there any issues that you think should get more attention or don't get the right kind of attention in the media?

Um more attention... yeah I think I said, the poverty thing is one thing that I think should get more attention and we could work together. I believe in, it's ridiculous that I even have to say this, but climate change, I'm a believer, because I believe in science I guess you know, I believe in science. I think it does not get fair coverage, especially in the current way, in the last administration in the Obama administration it was covered pretty well and you know the Paris accords it was a great first step but now with this new administration it feels like it's being pushed out the door and groups like EPA and NASA are having to form rogue twitters which is just unbelievable to get their viewpoints across, and I think that science is not valued enough in this country and I don't think that, I think that science should be independent in this country and that it should be framed in a better way than it is right now where it feels very politically charged and it really frustrates me as an engineer of course, it really frustrates me

Um what, this is kind of the heavy question, uh what do you think about the state of race relations in the US currently

Uh wow okay. This is tough because on the one hand I think that we've come a long way and we are heading in the right direction but the police, the state of the African American community especially and the police is something that I think is reaching a tipping point and I think its covered extremely unfairly in a lot of media outlets not all media outlets of course, and yeah I think that it's going in the right direction and it has been going in the right direction for a while but I think there is still a long way to go and its okay, but I don't want to say that it's okay and passable, because it's also hard for me especially because as a white person I have never, ever experienced it in my entire life I've never had any race discrimination so it's something that is hard for me to understand so I try as hard as I can to expose myself to people who have gone through this kind of stuff and like it just baffles me just the state of things with the police and I also listen to this is going to be super, oh well it's kind of connected, I listen to a lot of rap, specifically like Kendrick Lamar – **he's great** – he's extremely passionate about this kind of stuff and I think his voice is extremely

good I actually just saw him in concert in New York City it was amazing. But back to the point, he

makes an incredible voice for that kind of community so I like find myself feeling really passionate about it because you know I care about that community a lot and I think it's, its, it's like I said, where we're at is like passable but it could be a lot better and I have a vision of where it could be a lot less volatile state than where it is now. Like every week is like a new thing and every month there is like a new state like a horrible incident happens and it's just really frustrating to watch so yeah

And of whatever you know of New Zealand, what do you think about the state of race relations in New Zealand?

Um I do not know anything about New Zealand. New Zealand is one of the countries that I don't know anything about it. I'm so sorry – **that's okay haha** – I really want to cause I find it really cool and I definitely want to visit there some day from what USMF told me it's really amazing so I'd love to I don't know how things are there, is it good is it worse

It's not worse, it's not great I'm not sure it depends on who you ask I guess. Cause its more indigenous vs colonialist than, I don't know they're not that angry, I don't know. Yeah

That sounds interesting I might read up about it

Yeah everyone just says we're better than Australia for our indigenous people, so that's why people say it's good, but ehh it could be better I guess. Um could, what do you think about the BLM movement?

Uh okay I have mixed opinions because I don't believe in violent protest uh at all but and I wouldn't say that they're all violent or that all BLM you know movements are violent but there are some that um where they're damaging property and things like that and I don't think that's right. I think you can stand up for your rights without damaging other people's property and you know, damage to people or things that matter to them without doing that. The whole Civil Rights movement is a great example of that of obviously, like Martin Luther King and he believed completely in peaceful protest even when times are tough and look where we are. I think it's a much more effective way, I do think it's important and I do think that its good and I think it's an empowering thing for them and I can't take it

away from them and it's hard for me to have strong feelings about it because I don't go through that I've never gone through what it's like to be black, so I just try to support them and support the movement because it's something that empowers them as a people but I don't think it's okay to have violent protests.

So you would say it's a legitimate cause but some of their practices could be better?

Yeah a little bit, I agree. It seems a little bit disorganised as well, it seems like there are different factions within the black lives movement, where some are super aggressive and doing these public like light cars on fire and break windows like I think it was in Baltimore where they like broke this store and like that's not okay, but I think if they organised a little bit better and culminated their views together it's a really, I like to think their views are good, but I don't think they're acted out in the right way

How much media coverage or what kind of media coverage have you seen of the group?

Well I've seen all sorts of different types, I've seen positive portrayals of it through Facebook and people, black friends that I have that are behind the movement and posting about its success and then you obviously get negative media coverage which says like it follows stereotypes that say that this community is unstable like blah blah blah and paints them as this volatile and violent community and like you can't trust them and it bothers me. And then there's this backlash with the fact that they're protesting, and like I said I can get it to a degree on that side of things when they're breaking things and things like that and not doing peaceful protest but in terms of just trying to stamp out the movement because they don't agree with it. So I would say I've seen both sides of it

Yep cool. Has the BLM group or something similar or has like the same kind of motives I guess, ever come up in one of your favourite tv shows?

Um yeah let me think for a sec. um I wouldn't say the black lives matter, but when I said the Aziz Ansari Master of None episode where race was brought up as a form of discrimination towards actors I think that's a similar idea I guess. Like the perpetration of an idea of like they can only play one thing and the same idea for like black people right where they can only play certain characters or characters that are criminal or things like that. So I would say that I have consumed some tv that shares the similar viewpoint. And obviously The Wire is another great example

Yeah The Wire is like the perfect example for everything haha.

Well yeah in this way it is, because the show surrounds these characters, especially the black characters that are drug dealers but they paint them in a light that actually lets you get to know them as people and they're not painted as in most shows where they're just criminals to the core and they have bad backgrounds so of course they're criminals and that just perpetuates stereotype but in The Wire they actually portray them as interesting and developed characters and they actually have like motivation that like makes sense and you cope with them

Awesome that's all my questions so did you have anything else you wanted to add or any questions for me?

No, I'm happy to talk with you if you have any other questions feel free to contact me

No I'm all done thank you very much.

Chris's Interview Transcript

Bold – Interviewer Normal – Participant

So of the Shondaland TV shows, and you only watch Grey's Anatomy and HTGAWM?

Only those two not Scandal

That's all good, which of those two shows is your favourite and could you tell me a little bit about why

So I like HTGAWM more, but I like the setting of Grey's Anatomy better than HTGAWM if that makes sense. I like HTGAWM more probably because Viola Davis is one of my favourite actresses and she portrays the characters probably better than any actor on TV, out of all of them. She's phenomenal and I think the plot is very modern and very new age um as unrealistic as everything is inside of it as like murder, corresponding with law and how law students get involved in murder, it's just kind of very funny in that aspect in terms of plot. Grey's Anatomy I like a lot because I wanted to be a medical professional at one point in my life so I think that's why I like the setting better overall, but overall HTGAWM is my favourite.

Awesome, awesome. Who is your favourite character and could you tell me a little bit about why?

So in that it would be Viola Davis's character, she's just so smart and witty and her representation inside of the um, the entire plot is very vital. And to have such a strong female presence and such a strong female actor, especially in society nowadays it's great to see, and kind of empowering in its own way. She's the top dog and there's no question about it throughout the entirety of the show and it just shows very highly, and I think that's what attracts people to that show in particular. So I think that's why she's my favourite and her dialogue is perfect.

So is Viola Davis's character also the character you'd say you identify with the most?

That's a good question. I'd say no. And it's not because she's a woman or anything, that's completely beside the point it's just that she's super strong and super aggressive, and I

don't consider myself an aggressive person in anyway. Um if there is anybody in the show that I identify with it's Wes. Have you seen HTGAWM?

Yeah yeah they're my favourite shows

Yeah absolutely. Yeah it's definitely Wes. Wes's character is very to himself, and he's very internalised and I feel like I have a lot of dialogue with myself inside my head as he does. So I definitely relate more to his character if anything.

Is there any character in either show that makes you frustrated or one that you like the least.

Oh god. It's a. oh. I wish I knew the names better, that's such a bad thing for me. But the character that ends up dating Wes, but was dating the guy with the beard that killed the girl at the beginning.

Oh Laurel

Yes! She frustrates me so much and probably because I can't fully understand exactly what her intentions are a lot of the time. I feel like the other characters are pretty straightforward sometimes they're very stereotypical. But her character in particular she's just, she's just always so out there in terms of the way she expresses herself and it's kinda perturbing in a way. Just cause I can never fully understand what direction she's going and her actions just frustrate me completely.

Fair enough. Um what character if any do you have mixed feelings about or a love/hate relationship with.

Hmm. Probably the prom queen. She's, the one that dates the dumber guy. Um

Oh god what's her name?

It's not Courtney is it? No

Oh it's Mikayla

Yes Mikayla's character I have a love/hate relationship with because I know she's the smartest out of all of them it's very obvious, and she's a go getter but she is conceited in her own way and it shows throughout the entirety of the series. So she has her super high

points where she's super intellectual but then she has very low points where she's superficial and kind of self-serving but she kind of brought it back in season three when she brought the whole family drama back in, and she talked about her issues as well. So that's my love hate relationship

What about in Greys Anatomy? Do you have a favourite character in that show? OR one that you hate?

Grey's Anatomy, so I watch HTGAWM a lot, and Grey's Anatomy I watched a long time ago so I'll try to get everything straight. So my favourite is definitely Patrick Dempsey's character. I mean he was the protagonist all the way and he's the one who leads the show and I think a lot of the plot gets side-tracked a lot of the times too, and they get into lots of different relationships that go on that's not realistic for a hospital setting. But his character is very straightforward and very like um he's easy to understand I find

How did you first get introduced to the Shondaland shows

Two these two shows in particular?

Yeah

Grey's Anatomy I watched growing up, they always had reruns so I watched reruns here and there and I wanna rewatch the whole thing through cause I haven't had a chance to do that, I've caught up on episodes here and there and I haven't really watched a bunch. It wasn't in a chronological order or anything. But I got into that cause it was always present and easy to obtain. But um HTGAWM, I heard a buzz about it and I feel like we hear a lot about that too nowadays, especially with Netflix and its online, so people, like the more that I hear the name of a show the more I want to watch it and add it to a list of shows that I wanna watch so that one came up. It just sounded interesting, so I watched a couple of episodes with my friends and got really sucked into it. And at first I wasn't gonna watch season three, but then one of my friends brother was in the show **Oh cool** yeah so I ended up watching season three overall. But that one I got sucked into cause the name kept coming up

Cool. And how do you watch these shows? On TV or online?

So I'm terrible, cause I stream shows very often, which I know is so bad but I do it. I streamed all of HTGAWM and Grey's Anatomy I streamed a lot of that, but I did watch a good portion on TV as well

So the next couple of questions I've got a list of characters from those shows, and if you could just describe them in a couple of words just kind of what you think about them so the first one is

Meredith Grey – Um I'd say, oh three to five words, yikes. I'd say confident, I'd say flirty would be one of them as well, and I'd say knowledgeable

Jackson Avery - Um ooh it's hard to sum up these characters. I'd say confrontational depending on what season you're watching, I'd say big-hearted and I'd say determined.

Miranda Bailey - Oooh okay. These are bringing me back. I'd also say intelligent um I would say sharp-tongued at times. And I'd also say witty.

Alex Karev – Um light-hearted is the first one that comes to mind, I'd also say confident and passionate

Annelise Keating – Aggressive, um aggressive um she like I wanna say loves her profession so maybe like determined in that aspect, and I'd say kind of a hard-ass as well

Wes- Wes I'd say kind of confused, I'd say, I'd say intellectual as well and persistent

Bonnie – Bonnie ooh, I'd say um tragic, her backstory is so tragic, I'd say tragic I'd say very cronic like, cause she's always the side-kick and I'd say, a leader as well

Connor – Connor I would say, oh, poor decisions for a start I mean there's a lot of those. I'd say tricky, he's so hard to understand at times, but I get it why he's hard to understand if that makes sense and then I'd say confrontational

What other television shows do you like?

I like a whole bunch of shows like a bunch of different genres. Right now I'm watching House of Cards, the recent season. I've watched Orange is the New Black, what else have I watched, Master of None which is phenomenal. What else, sometimes I watch a lot of light- hearted tv shows as well so it's not all just heavy hitting dramas all the time. Um like I watched Samurai Jack, recently cause a new season came out. Yeah shows like that

And who is your favourite character in the other tv shows that you watch?

Okay I love and hate Kevin Spacey's character. He's another, actors that really take their part and then bring it to another level, make the show interesting. And Kevin Spacey did that above and beyond. He's definitely great. I'm trying to think of the other shows I

mentioned to you. Orange is the New Black I love um, oh I don't know how much you've watched I don't wanna spoil it – **I just haven't watched the season that come out last week** – okay but you've watched the season before? – **yep** – okay great um Poussey's character – **Heartbreaking** – I know! It shocked me. After that, like she was always my favourite character in that, and again she was a very down to earth character and I love her portrayal. Um I love what are other shows, let's see. It's so tough. The thing is like with Master of None there's not really, like I don't really like Aziz Ansari's character that's the only thing. I don't know that one's kind of a harder one. So I guess those strong characters yeah.

Lovely. Um and what character out of the other shows that you watch do you identify with the most?

Ooh, that's a good question. Oh man. Oh you know what, I forgot to bring this up also. I watch Scrubs and I speaking of identity, I identify with JD's character very much. JD's character is like the one I've seen in recent, if you can call it recent, tv that I very much identify with.

And why do you identify with him?

He's just quirky but like at the same time he is intelligent and he's very compassionate and he's determined to really find his way but at the same time he has those road bumps. He's human and it shows first and foremost that he's human and tries and he tries and he tries and I think that I really see myself as well.

Do any of your friends or family watch the same tv shows as you?

Oh yeah all the time. Oh I didn't bring up Game of Thrones! I'm just thinking about more tv shows that I watch. Yes. Family and Friends watch it, I have one roommate and we like come back from work and like decompress and watch all these shows on Netflix all together so a bunch of these shows that I brought up are ones that we've watched together um but yes my friends watch a lot of these and they're the ones who typically recommend the shows as well

And do you discuss what happens in the shows with your family or friends?

Ohh yeah big time. Especially GOT I think everyone across the board discusses and any time on Scrubs that there's like a heavy hitting scene, which is like all the time, typically we like pause it between going into the next episode and like talk about like what we just saw and how it was like oh god that hurt so badly, and why did it hurt so badly and so sad. So yeah I definitely discuss a lot of these shows with family and friends.

Do you ever discuss what happens in any of the shows online with strangers? Like on twitter, or Facebook or reddit?

Hmm no, I don't think so. I'm not like a Tumblr person, I'm not really one of those. I use social media but I know to use it smart, because spoilers suck so I know not to post things about that. No I can't say social media very often. Maybe through text.

Do you follow any of the actors or producers of HTGAWM or GA on social media?

Actors or producers.. No I can't say that I do.

From any other TV shows that you watch?

No, not really. I don't really follow the actors on anything. I like watching the award shows but I don't follow them necessarily on social media

Why do you not follow them?

Ooh, I don't want to say that they're lives aren't interesting that's so terrible, but – **it's okay they won't know it's fine** – I feel like celebrities nowadays, some of them are really great and some of them are doing very progressive things, the first one that comes to mind is Alicia Keys because she does, she's her own person and she's really cool. But she's not on a tv show. Anyway the characters on tv I think they lead really cool lives whether or not I'm interested in every cup of coffee they drink, which dogs they saw today. Not really important to me um typically I hear about things that they do through the news so and I think that's more eventful than some of the things they post on social media. Social media can be so frivolous at times and I just don't feel the need to add somebody like that into my social media realm if anything

Fair enough. Did you pay much attention to what any of the actors or celebrities that you like were saying during the last US election?

Oh yeah. Oh of course especially with House of Cards, you get all those announcements it was like perfect fuel for them. But um yeah its very interesting to see what side the celebrities are on, especially with this election this election is so bad. Which you'll probably talk about in a bit. Yes its very interesting to see what actors where in support or not in support of um Trump or not. So yeah yes.

So how did you feel about the actors you like, the candidate they were supporting

Oh A+! Was very obvious which ones they supported um a few names would shock me every once in a while and there were times where I did go on like Wikipedia and be like what are their actual political views have they supported certain candidates in the past but yeah it was very interesting to see a lot of them. But a lot of the actors I um I really like and really support and love their career um really did not like Trump, which was very important, it was good to see.

What kind of people surprised you?

Um like you know there were names that you know they always supported um the very strong conservative republican candidates in the past like um and not necessarily from TV but Stephen King as an author like he's always in support of the republican candidate. Less so now days um I think of books, I think of authors before I think of actors. But if we're talking actors like it's always great to see who shows up on these late night shows, like Stephen Colbert especially so Stephen Colbert was of course in support, was in support of Hillary Clinton um and it was great to see a lot of the candidates like Katy Perry was a big Hillary Clinton fan, Britney Spears, Christina Aguilera, um I mean just like really big names like that. Like a lot of the top actors are very much against Trump and they make that presence very well-known and I kinda think of more that have come out. I always think of articles like this person tweeted about so and so and we're shocked at what they see. A lot of actors that I've mentioned, Kevin Spacey, are not in support of Trump

Cool, um when Grey's Anatomy was created Shonda Rhimes made an effort to colour-blind cast, which means she did not write physical descriptions of any of the characters. What do you think about this?

Love it! A +, A+++ I think having diversity in TV is super important cause, I'm so like for this. Humans are all different we're all different colours, we're all different genders we're different. We're the same species under the name of being human but we're different in the

way that we go about life, and the way that we've grown up and our environments and who we are and what are race and ethnicity defines us and like coming into a colour-blind audition, is super important for these actors I mean there, like just look at the Oscars now days there's these huge debates on, on representation of black, African American actors within Oscars which is a big problem, it's so true we don't see a lot of representation inside of media like that and Asian actors as well. I mean you see Mark Wahlberg playing a Chinaman in this huge film, and it's just so not okay there's so many Asian American actors that could play the part. But yes coming into a colour-blind audition is super important um representation of different ethnicities and races in television is great, because its empowering to individuals that come from similar backgrounds, rather than just the whitewashed cast, that is just so bland that nobody wants to see. Like yes keep it interesting, that's the way to go. Especially for that time, that interests me that in that time period too they were so progressive. A+ Shonda Rhimes

In 2014 Shonda Rhimes became the first African American showrunner ever to have a three-hour block of prime-time television scheduling on a major network. What do you think about this?

Amen. It's so well deserved, like I think about Wonder Woman as well these days too how everyone is having this huge uproar about Patti Jenkins who is incredible as well. But to have a three hour block as an African American woman you said? Like incredible, lets pave some good ways, lets break that glass ceiling. Amen

Yay. Has there ever been an episode of GA or HTGAWM that made you rethink something or brought to your attention something that you hadn't realised or noticed before?

Before in the series or before as like a viewpoint?

As a viewpoint

Less so with Grey's Anatomy, because a lot of it I really did understand as I was growing up, like the medical field I understood that pretty well. But law I've never known very well, and I thought a lot of the um what Annalise Keating taught in her classroom especially was very interesting, like her posing certain points and people bringing up well if they did A then B would occur. I think, I think it made me think about law a bit more, cause at first I was so detracted from it where I'm just like it so bureaucratic and a lot goes

on. But at the same time law can be very engaging, it changed my opinion on how lawyers can be perceived. I mean the first word you think of when you think of lawyers is pretty bland, boring, like oh they're of the law you know whatever. But yeah she really changed my mind about that, it's just like these people can really fight for a lot and these people can really um represent people who don't normally get represented. It just changed my opinion on what lawyer can ultimately be synonymous with.

Cool, cool, cool. Um has there ever been an episode of GA or HTGAWM that caused a strong emotive response that you recall? That made you really upset or cry or really happy?

I mean GA I feel like I cried at every patient that died. It's always heart-breaking, and there's always really sad music, it like gets to me. So yes those always hit me pretty hard. Um HTGAWM I think less so honestly. Um I mean there were moments where I would like gasp because I'd be like oh my god that's a twist, that's crazy. But I think GA got me a little bit more like emotionally. I felt a little more emotionally attached to GA just because they progressed the characters a little more

Why do you think these shows are so popular?

They're popular because they're real. They choose settings that are not space, they choose settings that are, like I mean there are space things that are popular as well. They choose, like these shows in particular are popular because I think they have a strong representational background, in terms of the people that support them. They have strong actors that are involved. I mean like huge names like Patrick Dempsey, like Viola Davis those are big names that attract more and more people, just with the name alone. And then it's just the realness of the setting. You have two big professions, you have the medical profession for GA and law for HTGAWM and those are big things that a lot of people strive for, especially college students those are things that people really relate to. I can see why it's so popular because of those different aspects

Cool. Um do you, yourself often interact with people from a different or diverse background?

Oh I love that yeah absolutely. I was lucky enough where I went to school at Boston University which we have so many cultures that collide into one that's where I really became immersed in a little more culture than I was used to in a small suburb of New

York. So it's very different, it was a very enriching experience. But I try to surround myself with people that have different opinions to me, but not something super dramatic like go Trump, cause that's a lot. But like I love hearing other people's opinions as different as they may are

as conflicting as they may be I think it's important to surround yourself with those people. So yes I do consider myself someone who likes to surround myself with people from different backgrounds

Lovely. Um and are these people all friends? Or are they more family or acquaintances?

Um friends, the majority are friends yeah.

Awesome do you keep up with current events?

Yes. 100% yes.

Cool and in what form do you do this? Television, newspaper etc?

Television, social media really helps. Having like the trending aspect is really interesting, because it's a different aspect of looking at the New York Times versus looking at the trending section, because trending is more I think a full representation of population whereas New York Times which is more an opinion based um and sometimes you can really get lost in their opinion as well. But yes, I subscribe to the New York Times and I do have my social media aspects of learning about the news

Cool and what is your favourite form of news media?

I really do like the trending on Facebook. I think that's really big nowadays um social media in general and I think they do it very well.

Yep so would you get most of your news from Facebook? Like the stuff that pops up and is on trending?

I'd say yes but at the same time I still do further research just because fake news is this huge concept that now, so I see a topic and if I find interest in it or I find that it's kind of shocking or appalling in a way then I look to the New York Times to find the full articles

So is it, do you follow any news sites on Facebook? Like the New York Times or others? Like how you can like the page and all their stuff pops up?

I don't think I follow them, because I have friends on Facebook who like to share, and I appreciate that, cause the friends that share typically share different articles that are necessary. So instead of me following them I have my friends who kind of follow them for me. I sound like a parasite now which is hilarious but um yeah they always post different articles and I get sucked in cause its click-bait I easily just go right into. So I'd say no to following things

That's all good. Um do what social or political issues do you feel strongly about?

Oh god. Children, climate, education, education! Education is so big right now! I could fight for that until the end of the day. Um gun control, especially in schools. Um what other

topics are there, I'm just throwing out buzzwords at this point. But um yeah those are the main ones. Like children and education are the main ones for me, and gun control for me as well. Um oh as well as women's rights and pro-choice those are important to me as well.

Cool could you expand on why they're important or why you feel strongly about them

They're important because they're just basic human rights. Its surprises me more and more, no it doesn't surprise me that people are opposed to the idea it surprise me that they're opposed to the idea to the point that they're like I'm opposed to it therefore you should be opposed to it or can't have access to it. Which is so backwards, we're a human race lets express our choice and express our options. We all have different viewpoints and different decision making ideologies so, so let's come together and let's make more choice and more regulation, rather than less choice and bring us back to the 1930s in regard to some of our viewpoints and some of our legislation. It's just shocking to me. So I'm just very for my ideas because it just makes sense to be open. I don't fully understand why people are so closed off, I can understand why people are opposed to the ideas but I don't understand why they're opposed to the extent of wanting to constrict others viewpoints as well. It just doesn't make sense to me

So with that, but specifically why children, education and gun control? Why are those like your key, favourite ones?

Um the three? So I um, I grew up working in a summer camp. I was a director of the summer camp for a full year so I worked around children, like the majority of my life has been working around children. I was going to this camp and then worked my way up to being a counsellor and director and actual director. And I just worked around children and children are so funny because they are in the midst of figuring out the world and they're in the midst of understanding and really trying to form their own opinions and it's just so important to be open to kids at that age because they're able to be molded into our future generation. We need to learn that there are options for them and there is opportunity for them and I think it's so important to express that and if we're to showing through our legislation and the way that we are molding the minds of tomorrow with such constricting manner and in such again, bringing us back to the 1930s manner then how are we to look toward the future when we're looking into higher technology, ways to cure disease like cancer, it's just it's our fundamental rights that need to have a strong basis before we move onto some of the bigger things. And these kids are I'm like we're a finite species we're only going to live for so long, each one of us. But these kids are the prime of getting to that point of living so let's give them what we have. So children 100% are like I love it.

Um education goes tandem with that because without a strong educational system how can these children learn and grow to the extent that they can. So access for everybody to education, a cheap education but at the same time, not cheap, affordable education so that these children can have the best bang for their buck and most face the world um even some of the harshest urban civilisations and cities across America. So education is super important to me.

Gun control especially too. The second amendment just bothers me so much the right to bear arms is just so controversial. It was meant for militias not meant for American citizens like great have your hobby but just choose something else. Like you knit a blanket. I, I just

don't see the appeal in it, I guess other people see the appeal in it its some sort of weird power complex with people with small hands but like whatever cool, sounds good. It just bothers me, it's like your handing, there are people who literally have weapons inside of their households, more children die all the time because they have guns in their households because they're father has guns and goes out hunting. Why, why are we doing this. It's so

backwards it's just so backwards. Let's have more regulation in terms of that. People are dying because of guns inside of our country and it's so harsh to see there's another school shooting and that more and more people have access to these firearms, because of different loopholes that are going on. Close these loopholes get rid of this for the public like who cares, cry about it, I don't really care it's killing the people. Guns are destructive weapons there is nothing good that comes from them.

Um do the television shows that you watch reflect any of these issues in anyway? In story- telling, casting or setting or?

Oh yeah. If we're talking about casting and not just the shows themselves I could see that. I could see the way in which representation inside the media is super important in both of these shows. Like they're both standouts, in terms of like Shonda Rhimes, like in terms of how strong women are portrayed I mean GA is the forefront of strong women being portrayed inside of media in general and for so many seasons as well. Viola Davis herself, just incredible. So go figure, she's great. But um yes they do, they do share a lot of the issues that go on especially gun control with HTGAWM and a lot of law issues as well.

Cool cool. Are there any social or political issues that you think are over or under played in the media or in general?

In the media as of today?

As of today yeah

That's interesting. Social or political issues. Well I think what is terrible about the media in general is that it works off spikes. It works off of buzzwords that come about somehow stirs up a lot of drama creates a media frenzy then dies out completely. Um gun control I absolutely think is so undermined by the media because it's always the same horrid cycle where it's lets mourn some horribly violent attack inside of schools in small areas inside of these zones that are typically considered safe for people and it's just brought up to this frenzy and really focussing on it and then it just dissipates and then they talk about what the celebrities new weight loss beverage is for the week. And it's just so horrible to see that, because it's like this is the issue it's like let's talk about ways that we can help rather than ways to like just cover it. It's very surface in terms of the media in a lot of these different issues. But there's nothing that says okay this is what we're presenting with this is the details we know right now we'll keep you updated but here's how you can help

overall, here's the direct line to how you can help and I think that needs to be represented more.

So are there any issues that you think are overplayed in the media?

Overplayed right now. Oh god. Just Trump in general. It's just like, and him on twitter I've just had enough of. I think he brings up these little issues on twitter and it causes that same feedback because he is the president of the US so anything he says on twitter, that's like a very short thing altogether that he's outraged about becomes this media frenzy, so I think that's a big thing. As important as these investigations are into this whole Russia thing with Trump, I think that's very overplayed right now this whole like Comey testifying as well as Sessions testifying is just very overplayed in terms of some of the issues we have going around. I mean like just looking at that is just ridiculous to me because there are other issues right now such as North Korea or maybe the state that London is in right now after the Manchester bombings and they've had all these different incidents that have happened in the last month I don't know I find that kind of important. But it's just like everyone is stirring around this all of this Trump stuff. It's like let's get past this and let's get back to the issues that really matter.

Cool are there any issues that you think should get more attention?

Definitely gun control and definitely right now, climate change that really needs to be addressed it's so downplayed of course. Um and everything with Betsey DeVos our education secretary just needs to be more present, because the things that she's doing are horrific and the things that she says are even more scary because she's in charge of all of our debt for education as well as all our future educational programs and she's doing a terrible job. So yes that needs to be up-played a lot more

Cool so um are there any issues that you think don't get the right kind of attention?

Kind of attention in terms of spotlights inside of the media or?

Yeah or they're played up in a way that you don't think is, or like they're played up in the wrong way or something like that

Um , well I think, I think in particular I go back to the Clinton email thing I think that was the prime example of something that was so poorly played inside the media that really

influences a lot. It's just the words that people say that can really influence people I think the Clinton emails was a big issue for me of being wrongly portrayed in the media um yeah and still I think this Trump stuff as well.

Yeah no that's cool. So this is kind of the crux of the questions, so um what do you think about the state of race relations in the US at this point in time?

Its sucks. Oh god. It will always be strained. It will always be strained and there is nothing that can change it, there are things that can ease it a lot better. But there are but, but and especially oh god, going from Barack Obama who was a President who was very inclusive and very equal and very fair and being the first African American to sit in the White House. I just go back to thinking about Michelle Obama, who literally said in a speech, she has to sit down in a house that was built by slaves and she's an African American woman herself, that was such a powerful thing. Like to get to that point in the US is huge but in terms of race relations all together we're not at a point that's going to surpass anything from our past. I

mean slavery happened, it was bloody it was horrific it was inhuman at times too and there is nothing that could prevent us from forgetting that portion of our history and that is where America grew and it's so sad to say. I mean humans are humans and that's always going to be first and foremost. But at the same time the way that people go about expressing themselves to people opposing opinions, especially nowadays with Trump is terrible. I mean you look at the rallies altogether and you see people screaming at each other because they have different backgrounds I mean they're throwing words at each other but then words escalate to fists and violence and just outrage all together and all this hate is built up that just pours itself out at different points so race relationships are probably right now at an all-time low. Yeah just because this morale is so low

No that's cool. And of what you know of New Zealand, if you know anything about New Zealand what do you think about the state of race relations in NZ?

So I think um so I don't know. So I studied abroad in NZ for 6 months which is great, so I know a lot about NZ from that. I love NZ. I think, so I was there for 6 months so I can't really attest to too much. From what I could tell a lot of people were very friendly, very open and willing to accept other people that were outside of their culture into it. Yet at the same time, looking at just the demographics alone, especially looking at Maori versus Pacific Islander versus just Caucasians in general um I could see a lot of the same racial

tension between Maori individuals and people of a Caucasian background or European at that matter. Um I mean that's still present because of the different backgrounds that went about that too. Um which is it is very similar with the way that works with America as well. Which is, which I found most interesting when learning about that history, there still. The Treaty is still very big, Treaty Day for all of you is still huge. Um but I think, the state that NZ is in for their race relationships is a little better than where the US is at um but it's still will never be fully solved if that makes sense I think it's still rooted in that same aspect of colonialism being a contributing factor to how the Maori view um other people from European background. I think that's just as complicated as African Americans view inside the US.

Cool um could you, what are your thoughts on the BLM?

I think, it's so important! I think it's terrible when people undermine that as well when people spread the Blue Lives Matter, All Lives Matter it's like I get what people are trying to do overall but Black Lives Matter started out as Black Lives Matter. Don't push it out to anything else, because African American individuals need to be seen, and there is a huge problem in terms of police activity um involving African Americans, I'm sorry but they are. They're discriminated against. They are um it is a racially charged subject right now and they need something, African Americans need something to rally for and Black Lives Matter is such a strong point of view in that aspect. And a lot of the times they're very peaceful and they speak a lot of really profound words and it's like haven't we taken enough from this minority group of individuals, to expand it even more. It's such a micro-aggression to when people say All Lives Matter, like come on like you can't give African Americans something? Please let them have something to rally against like it's such an important movement I honestly think it's very important.

How much media coverage or what kind of media coverage have you seen of the BLM?

It peaked and it is dying down rapidly right now which is unfortunate because it's still a present force and there are rallies that occur especially in major cities like Chicago, like New York City like you'll still see rallies here and there, there are signs in Boston where I am right now that have Black Lives Matter in like windows in huge churches on main streets. Um but the media covered it a lot at the beginning and then it died down very

quickly and then All Lives Matter happened, Blue Lives Matter happened and that became a very charged subject and then it died down because that's the media for you.

Do you think there should be more media coverage of the group to kind of re-rally it

Most definitely. I feel like most people who are heading it especially are people that are, I mean they feel so strongly that they're rapping for something I mean come on give them a platform or something. They had, like it's like having 15 minutes of fame it's like these people should not be having 15 minutes of fame they should be fighting like all the time and they should be getting the correct amount of coverage for doing so. It should definitely be a hotter topic right now and be portrayed even more in the media. Cause I think, I think they need to be visible. I mean they are, but they need to be more visible to all the America

Has the BLM group or a movement that is similar, like trying to emulate them ever come up in any of your favourite tv shows?

Yeah you know. So I watched Mr Robot recently, and they have this whole anarchy movement against the government and they're trying to shut down the banking system which is really interesting but they had that whole movement that was surrounded by the one aspect of like hacking into the government and um the movement was very similar because it caused different communities especially like communities in major urban cities to really rally um kind of against the man if anything. So I think that was the strongest representation that I've seen of sort of anarchy against the system as a rallying group then.

Cool that was all the questions I had did you have anything else you would like to add?

No that was good

Cool thanks.

